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THE ROAD-WANDERER

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The Road-Wanderer

By

HENRY D. SHAWCROSS

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS book is composed of selected chapters from the author's first and only book, *Nature and the Idealist*, published some years ago, mainly for a private circle. That book has an In Memoriam article telling something of the personality of the writer of these essays.

We are told that as a child he was remarkable for his beauty and no less for his sense of the rhythmic beauty of words. It is indeed remarkable to hear that, when under three years old, he took a delight in slowly chanting over and over to himself Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. For the rest he was a normal healthy child, fond of sports, and popular at school with his teachers and schoolfellows. At sixteen he entered into the family tradition of journalism by joining the reporting staff of the *Northern Daily and Weekly Telegraph*. Daily

journalism is not supposed to be a good training school for literature in the eclectic sense of the word, but some authors have managed to preserve a very fine style even in the rough and tumble of journalistic life. Henry D. Shawcross was one of them. The secret is beautifully exposed by the writer of the In Memoriam article already referred to :

" He had a soul sensitive to the spiritual loveliness of the world. His sense of poetic beauty grew as he grew ; he saw it in the dusky highway ; from a railway carriage window ; in streets that opened out into the countryside and even in dull slums and grim alleys, if he could only get a glimpse of the rosy morning sunrise or golden evening skies above and between the chimney-pots. Most of all he loved the wild unfathomable beauty of the lonely moors and hills, swept by

' Wind-enchanted shapes of wandering mists.' "

His life was just opening into fuller manhood when death overtook him and he went out all too soon for the wide circle of friends who admired and loved him. We are persuaded that this little volume, which takes its

place in a well-established series, will enlarge the number of those who regret that so promising a life should have spun so short a thread, and that so beautiful a spirit should have had such a brief opportunity for expression.

A. M.

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Have we Discarded Nature?

I

SOMETIMES at the close of a summer day, when the westering sun is throwing long, cool shadows over the grey streets, I go up to a window in a house which stands on the slope of the hill overlooking a Northern town. The streets which have hummed all day with the noise of the labouring people are growing more hushed as the mellow evening light falls upon the long lines of dull, drab roofs and lights dusty, grimy walls with touches of unlooked-for gold. Even the town, fast bolted and barred as its gates are against all the influences of Nature, yet feels, hovering above the fretful tumult of toil, the peace which the evening has eternally brought through all the long ages of the world.

The dark smoke-clouds that hang heavily above the streets during the heat of the day have been silently taken into the sky's sweet blue, and the azure depths are untainted with

the slightest vestige of their murk and gloom ; the roaring clamour of the streets, the whirr and roll of the machinery in a thousand workshops are stilled ; and only a restful murmur of satisfied calm rises from the town, save where the streets echo here and there with the sweet, shrill voices of children at play upon the pavements that are lit with the evening sunlight's gold.

The vast maze of the town covers the valley right away to the foot of the distant hills that lie toward the glowing west. Between, the factory chimneys stand tall and high, idealised in the glowing sunset, till they seem no more dark towers of the castles that imprison the town's toilers, but rise like the classic columns of old temples.

And the sunset touches the hills with ruddy light once more in all the history of the rolling world. Only those two things are unchanged, of all that lies within the sight of the dwellers of this Northern valley—the hills and the sunset. So many, many years have gone and yet they are the same. And it is good to think of that when one looks down upon the wilderness of crowded streets, where

all day long the people hurry and pass by, and all is constant, never-ending movement and ever-restless change.

It is good to look down, even upon the town, in the evening. For, as the hum of the toiling thousands dies and faints into a dim, murmurous peace in the twilight's restfulness, I realise, that despite all the unnatural haste and fevered hurry of the times, Nature is still the ruler of the world, though humanity has become so rebellious against her sway. For let us think of it a little.

Even in these latter days, when we have all taken to huddling ourselves miserably behind the darksome walls of our towns (so that, I suppose, we may keep a more vigilant watch upon each other as we struggle to attain a precarious place in our system of life), Nature still creeps up to our very gates, unwelcomed but still undaunted, in spite of all our efforts to construct the life of humanity upon an artificial plan and all our striving to ignore her influence in our existence. It is one of the results of what we call " civilisation " that we have gradually and almost unconsciously come to regard Nature as something apart from the

progress and organisation of human life, something apart from our work, our pleasures, our joys and our sorrows.

We are becoming so completely fettered by the bondage of mechanical drudgery, so entirely enveloped in the cities' endless turmoil of toil, so utterly engrossed in the grasping fight and endeavour for the exaltation of self (and the best or worst of us, mark you, must perforce engage in the fight, must needs take arms however unwillingly, or defenceless be stricken down and lost in the struggle) that we have forgotten Nature altogether. Or at least the term " Nature " has become invested with a false meaning and is being used to designate an influence which, however sweet and joyous and uplifting to the human heart, has at any rate no concern with, and is entirely separate from the ordinary affairs of human life.

But surely the true meaning is something far different. Nature includes everything—all that is natural in the world. And is not humanity natural ? And being natural ought not the mortal life of humanity to be lived also wholly and entirely in accordance with Nature ? Is not humanity—you and I, the lord who lolls

in his gilded palace, the beggar who stands at the muddy street crossing—are not we all, too, or rather should we not all be, part of the great, all-embracing scheme of Nature? Nature means to us all that is beautiful in the world—the windy hills, the salt fresh sea, the green aisles in the woodlands, the rivers with their eternal songs, the fields of spring, the sunshine, and the stars of the still silent night. All these it includes; but does it not include mankind also? Would not human life lived to the fulness of its glory, joy and power be beautiful too? would it not be almost more beautiful and fair than any of these?

And yet to-day we speak and act as if mankind must live apart from all these things—as if it had become necessary that our work must be done amid ugly, unpleasant, sordid surroundings—and as if we must only go back to Nature at occasional moments when we can force ourselves to spare one or two from the well-nigh endless and utterly weary round of dull and often all-too-useless toil.

By taking such a view we are making the admission, though we may not realise it, that our life, with all its combination and organisa-

tion of work and pleasure, our whole plan of existence to-day is *not* natural at all—is entirely separate and apart from, and without Nature altogether—that it is merely artificial. And that is how it is that our great cities and towns as they have sprung up throughout this land of ours, besides having become centres of great wealth, and many inventions, fine buildings, and stately streets, have also become great centres where much misery and wrong and injustice and wretchedness exist.

That is how there comes to be so much that is evil in our "civilisation." Poverty, disease, injustice, however unwittingly and unwillingly they may be caused, are not natural. In all the wide field of Nature you will find them nowhere, save in the life of humanity. Unfettered, uninterfered with, Nature abounds in wealth—the true wealth that is of joy and happiness—open-handed, lavish wealth, and joy and happiness everywhere. And the very fact that any system of life contains those other products of unnaturalness proves that the system itself is largely unnatural.

Mankind in the building up of a system of so-called civilisation has discarded Nature.

We have refused to listen to her promptings and to learn the lessons that she is constantly teaching. We have cast out her influence from our lives. We have endeavoured—unconsciously maybe and without seeing where it was going to lead us—and we have so far been only too successful in our endeavour, to shut Nature out utterly from our individual hearts and lives, and from our collective system of civilisation. And we are beginning to pay very dearly for it now, with all the almost hopeless and unspeakable misery that exists wherever men have gathered together in great numbers; in the wretched disease-breeding slums that exist in every one of the great centres of population; in the general chaotic unloveliness of the arrangement of our large towns and cities.

And all these things are here despite the discoveries science and invention have made for us, and which had we shaped our modern system to natural conditions would have gone to make human life brighter and fuller of glowing hope and to the greater realisation of long-dreamed-of-ideals than ever the world had known before in all her history.

And yet, despite all this, when I look out

over the town as the hush of the evening falls, I know that Nature is still the ruler. Though we have turned from Nature, she never turns from us, her children. Were it so, even the evening would mean nought to us now. When the sunset floods the western sky with glorious red and gold it still means, as it always has done, that the resting-time is near. It may be that to-day we only sleep and rest because it were otherwise impossible to maintain our strength for the daytime's work—that even the night is only considered to be of use because it renews man's reserve of strength for toil. I will grant that. It only shows that even the modern system, with all its artificiality, cannot overcome Nature to the extent of making human beings work without a due meed of rest.

Yes, there is hope still. Hope is the very essence of Nature. And as long as the evenings come with their message of rest, so must mankind realise more and more that the natural life is the only true, full life, and that the true, full life of humanity must be unbreakably bound up with Nature.

The Passing of the Years

II

SOMETIMES when I am looking over the town in the evening, my thoughts wander back through the ages to some other evening of long ago, when the sun was setting over the hills above this same valley. With all the influences and traditions of modern life bred, as it were, into the very fibres of one's being, it is hard to carry back one's thoughts to those far-off days, let us say, two thousand years ago, and the visions beheld in the mind's eye are but dim and ghostly shapes of what the reality must have been.

I should like to see it all again. As I think, the maze of streets, the grey roofs of the houses, the tall factory chimneys with their dark smoke-clouds, fade away, and in a moment the valley is filled with virgin forest far and wide, extending from hill to hill across the whole compass of the vale, with here and there the silver glint of a wandering stream flashing between the myriad leaves. Under the very base of the

house in which I am now writing one of these same streams flows to-day. I remember, one day some years ago, excavations made in the garden below led to it being uncovered at one place, and there, deep down between the dark, dank, earthy walls the waters flowed with a mysterious ripple that came up in a low, dim murmur to my ears.

I wondered then, and I wonder still, what the spirit of the stream thinks of the change that has passed over the valley as the years have come and gone ; wonder if it ever remembers and thinks of those other days when the face of its laughing waters was upturned to the golden kisses of the sunlight and the fair blue of the sky was reflected in the broken ripples of the stream ; when a thousand birds sang in the heavy-leafed branches above, and strange wild beasts came down in the hush of the evening to drink at the cool reed-fringed marge ; when the spring came, and the valley burst out into a gush of foliage and blossom.

Ah !—the spring. What must this valley have been in the spring-tides of those other years ? Mile upon mile of glittering, glistening, dew-washed green leaves—the fra-

grance of the southern breezes—the flower-spangled forest aisles—the tangled, untrodden trackless, woodland undergrowth—the storm of silvery bird music sounding far and wide all through the long sunlit day as the year turned onward to the fulness of the summer.

Would that those days were back again, and I were here, still. Many and many a rolling year has passed into the great silence since. How many a spring has filled and refilled the vale with the glory of its gladness in the years that lie between the then and the now?

The light of the evening fails, and the night comes with chill, strong winds blowing in from the western sea beyond the hills. The stars that have outshone ten thousand springs shine out again from the sky that is more unfathomable than the countless ages. Wider than the waters of the ocean, deeper than its unsounded depths, is the mystery of passing time. How it dwarfs into utter insignificance, nay, even casts into soundless oblivion, the puny affairs of men—their little plottings and plannings, their strifes and their peacefulnesses, their systems and their creeds. Such things lived in the past—hundreds and hundreds of times.

Systems were conceived, schemes brought to fruition, creeds created and worshipped, all lived through their little day—where are they now but lost in the mystery and oblivion of the forgotten ages?

Yet all is not lost, nor all forgotten. Amid all the changefulness of time, there is something that is changeless. There is something that is still the same here in this single northern valley as in all the world, though the whirling years have swept so much away with the flood of their resistless tide. Through all the ages something has remained steadfast amid the wildest storms of time.

As the stars shine in heaven eternally, as the waves of the sea beat for ever on the shore, so does the spirit of Nature remain for ever with the world. Now, as I look from my window and think of those other years, the rolling forest that once covered the valley has gone—vanished as utterly as the morning mists go from the mountain side at the coming of the sun. Where it once stood in all its barbaric grandeur are the streets, the houses, the factories, and——

Still, once more in all the ages, the evening

sunlight is falling in golden beams upon the hills across the valley. And though the vale that lies below has changed so vastly, still the spring comes with its radiant glory ever new, and there are still valleys, where the woods burst into a blaze of glistening emerald, and the happy bird-songs ring out to the blue vault of heaven. In this is the hope of the world—the hope of humanity, too. Time, so full of mystery, is fleeting and despairful; Nature and the mighty unseen power that is behind her are eternal, and breathe an immortal hope to mankind.

So in a moment does the mind attempt to compass the change of two thousand years—a change so great, so mighty, so stupendous that the thought is almost overwhelming. It is almost too great to be grasped in the infinitesimal space of thought that has conjured up on the site of the modern town the wild forest-covered valley of the dim, past ages. Rather would I have seen, had it been possible for mortal to witness such an immortal sight, the mighty transformation as the slow movement of the centuries of Time wrought upon the face of the world.

And then I wonder sometimes if some mysterious, unknown revolution of the ages will ever bring back again to the sight of men all the wild, wondrous splendour of the rolling forest as it was in those far-away days of old. Yet my inner consciousness tells me that never again will the scenes of the long-past years be re-created in the world. The mysterious moving finger has written *that* story once and for all time; and.

> . . . having writ
> Moves on; nor all thy piety and wit
> Can lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.

The past is the past eternally. However vivid and glowing the picture that the imagination may paint, it is but a picture at the best, cold and unlit by the burning fire of life. The only life is the life that is and that which is to come. Time moves not in circles, but ever onward, onward to the great Ending which will be no ending, but immortal and eternal. Were it not so, the future would have no meaning to us. It would be but a returning and an ever-returning to the beginning of all things again.

It is forward then that we must look, and

not backward, not even at the present as though the progress of human life had come at last to its final and stationary state. So we gaze with dreamful eyes into the future to the glowing vision of a full and perfect life. So have men of noble minds and lofty aspirations gazed in every age of the world since the power of thought and the knowledge of Soul first lit the human mind. There is something still beyond the best that we have done. Most of us realise this in a dim, vague, half-conscious sort of way. And yet, realising this, it is strange that the feeling should be so widespread that to-day is the only thing to be taken into account.

"Take things as they are," says our false philosophy, "that is the only practical way." The idealist is regarded as an idle dreamer who wildly aspires to unattainable things. It was only the other day that three different persons assured me within an hour that the modern industrial system having become established, a return to the ideals of Nature in the life of humanity was precluded for ever. They did not all say so in the same words, but their conclusion was there, none the less. Yet the dawn of every day, the coming of every spring,

are direct denials of such a hopeless pessimism. In the sweet May days the earth is ever on the brink of a fuller life, and, sweet as the spring is, yet the summer is always sweeter still, for with it comes the realisation of the hopes of spring and the fulfilment of all the golden dreams that made bright with promise the youth of the days of May.

I wish that every one would go and see the dawning of each successive summer; for if they would, then the latent joy of life would come back to them with the reawakening life of the earth, and the feeling that with Nature at least the fulfilment of her ideals is never-failing. The man who looks upon the ideal with contempt and impatience ought to get up in a morning and watch a few dawns break. Then he would see one ideal at least that never fails of realisation. Nature realises her ideals and her promises with ever-repeated life and truth. There is no hope that she does not bring to fulfilment.

And if Nature can so bring the daybreak out of the black depths of the night and the dawning of the summer out of the long, dark night-tide of winter, then man, who is the child of

Nature, can surely bring his dreams and ideals to fulfilment also. Nay, not "can"; surely he MUST by the very nature of things, if there be aught in the lessons of the daybreak and the spring.

So I believe that humanity, too, is approaching the brink of a fuller, deeper life than ever the world has known. Even as the summer of the earth, so will be the summertide of the life of mankind—full of boundless beauty, happy as the golden sunlight, unsullied as the sweet blue of the sky. And that will be when all the mists of doubt and travail are swept away from before our beclouded eyes, and the great realisation is borne in upon us that the fulness of the beauty and power and joy of humanity is only to be found in complete accord and unity with the mighty, loving spirit of Nature that pervades the widest spaces of the whole universe.

A Return to Nature

III

I BELIEVE firmly and steadfastly that in the coming years the ideals of humanity will be at last seen to be identical with all these Nature ideals that around us every day in the great earth are being constantly brought to fruition and fulfilment. I believe with Richard Jefferies that "ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky, shall become as it were interwoven into man's existence." Humanity will go back to Nature then; rejoice with the joy of the sunshine; life shall be full of the utter fulness of the summer; our thoughts shall be the thoughts of the depthless blue of the spaceless sky; our lives full of the calm of the night and the stars.

Then the joy of the spring shall be the joy of the people, and not as it is to-day, when so many know nought of spring, of the great message of eternal hope that the spring brings,

so dull and soulless are their outlooks and their lives. There will be no chaos, no disorder, no disorganisation then ; all will proceed with the steady, orderly progress of the seasons. And life will be life then—life with all its " powers of love and joy and admiration " ; life that is life not merely in name, but full to the uttermost of Nature. And this will be a life, not for the few, but for all.

A great change, you say ? Yes. But not greater, not more impossible, not less probable than the change I pictured just now, as I looked from my window over the valley—the transformation of the wild, rolling, trackless forest to the modern town. Time is ever moving and Nature will claim us all again—sometime. Nature in the end embraces all, overwhelms all, conquers all with her great and abiding power. When shall it be, you say ? At least, not later than death ! Then at least, we must all go back to Nature. From that return there is no escaping. All your contempt of the ideal, all your utterance of vain and empty words will avail nothing against the final conquest of Nature. Ah ! Nature exacts a complete revenge on all who turn away from

her. We may fight her everywhere, turn from the joy and beauty of her life, but we cannot turn from the sadness of her death.

Why, then, discard and forget Nature in life? Why should humanity be the only force in the world that is outside her gladness and beauty? Why should not mankind enter at once and for ever into her joy?

Nature does not mean death; it is only we who have made her mean that, by casting away her influence upon our lives. Let us, too, feel the gladness of the spring, which pulses through all the earth at the advent of the May. Let us feel the glory of the summer when all life is at its full. Then, like the earth whose children we are, there will be to us no sadness in the wind of autumn, and the falling leaves, for they foretell the winter not of death, but only of the sleeping time of the world that shall again reawaken to the glory of the spring as the years roll on; and the fading years in the autumn of our lives will no longer be filled with the sadness of the memories of a wasted, toil-worn life, but will be like the still and peaceful evening of a perfect day, when the calm into which life is sinking shall be the more

calm, for the happiness with which the day has been filled.

I feel more and more that the mortal life of humanity must draw closer and closer to Nature as the years go by. All around is that hope spoken, and its gladness rings throughout the world. It is here even in the very heart of the town. I know an old, quiet street that lies just apart from the stream of the ever-flowing human traffic, and there I have seen peeping between the cold, hard pavements tiny springing blades of green grass, striving, yet flourishing, and gaining ever greater room for growth, against all the attempts to crush them out of existence.

Long ago, where the street was, lay a fair, green meadow maybe, that once was filled every day with the brightness of the morning sunshine. Then came the town, that covered it over with its hard, unnatural streets. But still the meadow lay there beneath the stones, beyond the light of the sun, and still the spirit of Nature lived down in the moist, damp earth below. I like to think that some day, when the town has gone, that street will be a meadow once again, glittering under the golden sunlight

and with the wind whispering through the waving grass. And even as it is now, those "narrow points of feeble green," as Ruskin called them, tell still the eternal story—that in the end Nature conquers all, is greater than all.

And then I remember that not long ago I was down in an old village that is built on the site of a Roman fortification that existed some two thousand years ago. A little company of enthusiastic archæologists intent upon rescuing from the dim recesses of the bygone ages some poor relics of the faded glory of the ancient days, and anxious to throw additional light upon the history of a long-passed nation, had been for some time conducting extensive excavations on the site of the old fort that once, all those centuries ago, had been garrisoned by the glittering legions of the Southern Empire, then the mistress of the known world.

And there in an old garden shaded by burgeoning trees, cut into the soft greensward were the grey open trenches that had been dug out by the excavators. The long grass grew richly and luxuriant up to the very edge of the damp, grey earth that had been thrown out

from below. Down in the depths of one of the trenches was a pavement of worn, cold, grey stones. We left the soft, gentle garden of grass, and stepped down upon the old stones of the Roman pavement. For long, long centuries had those carefully-laid slabs been silent and unseen beneath the earth and the grass where the wind had rustled and made murmur its sweet and gentle songs.

Through all the bygone years my thoughts went back as my feet touched that ancient pavement. How many feet had passed along that way? How many a grave and solemn question had been discussed above those dull and silent stones as the soldiers had walked to and fro over them? How many happy, whispered stories of love and life and gladness had fallen upon that age-worn roadway as softly as the spring sunshine falls upon the sleeping earth? Once the Roman villas stood beside it, and in the rooms inside the people talked of their far-off land under Southern skies, and ate and drank and said their grim grace, "Memento Mori," to the silver skull that was presented at the table. What terrible scenes of battle and bloodshed came before the end and

the fall of that mighty Empire, when the wild barbarians of the North overwhelmed the land with horror and death? And now—— And now——

Long ago had the earth closed over the aged stones; long had the voices of those who walked upon the roadway been for ever silenced; long had the grass swayed and whispered in the winds above; long had the cycle of the seasons turned and turned—spring, summer, autumn, winter; the perennial tale of the birth, life, decay and death of Nature, and always the beginning again, had been told—how many times? As I thought of it all—thought of the splendour and glory of that dead nation, thought of all the years that had passed since they had lived their little day and passed into the eternal mystery—the weight of the centuries overwhelmed me. Is it all for naught, then? "All a striving and a striving, and an ending in nothing?" Well might those old Romans say, "Remember Death"!

And then, as I climbed out of the trench, something soft and sweet and tender, like the kiss of a fairy maiden, brushed against my cheek, and the wondrously sweet scent of

spring-time flowers was wafted on the afternoon breeze. I looked up, and there on the verge of the bank, overhanging the cold, grey depths, was a branch of fairest, tenderest apple blossom. Moved by a sudden, irresistible impulse, I grasped a handful of the tender petals, and threw them down into the dim depths where the Roman pavement lay. I saw the sweetness of the spring fall gently and tenderly down, down, to where lay the memories of those dead soldiers who so long ago had found the answer to the question that rings eternally through the ages.

And as I thought again, I was sorry that the old pavement had ever been uncovered—sorry that it had not been left for ever to lie forgotten beneath the cold, still, silent earth, and the springing grass and the murmur of the wandering breezes. For now I knew there was something greater than all the splendour of those ancient days, something more than all the memories of the bygone years, something mightier than the best that human effort had ever realised. Remember death? No, no, no! "Forget death," said the apple blossom, "for we never die." "Remember life," said

the spring, "for I come again, ever and ever again, through all the countless ages." So the flowers and the spring told me of the greatest power in all the world. "Remember not the past," they said; "there is no past. There is only the spring and the summer and the flowers that shall come again and ever again through all the immortal future."

So in death we must all go back to Nature, as those old Roman soldiers did. Why, then, not in life, too? Shall the soft awakening breezes of spring and the sweetness of the summer flowers fall only on our graves? Shall the sun shine only upon our closed eyelids? The winds and the flowers and the sunshine and the summer sky are not for the dead; they are here now. Let us take them, therefore, into our lives.

The Road-Wanderer

IV

ONE day I chanced to stand for a few moments at the place where the road leaves the town and issues forth into the open country. For some distance before it reached this point the road had thrown off the gloom of the herded houses and factories; already the trees had begun to droop over its course, and the leaves were stirred with a wind yet untainted by the town. Only behind I still saw the pall of smoke, woven by the blackened fingers of the chimneys, and knew that beneath were the noisy streets and the clattering pavements, filled with the thronging people, breathless with hurry and toil and lack of the pure air of heaven.

By now the road had left these dark things behind. It had tasted of the fresh country breeze, and seen the sunlight on the meadows and the azure of the morning sky, and it went forth joyously stretching its whitened way

down past the trim villas (the last of the town houses), with their grassy lawns and gay-hued flowers, to a land that lay in the distance, of peace and content, of fair fields full of the waving corn. For a while it was lost amid the wooded tracts of country lying near at hand; then it was seen again, a white thread winding through the distant valley, until at last it was lost in the blue haze that stretched to the horizon.

And for me there was only the turning back to the hideous town! I could not follow the road on its journeying to-day. How the sun would shine down upon the hot, dusty highway, I thought; and how pleasant the shade of the stately trees by the old hall! How green the meadows would seem to my eyes, dimmed and wearied with the dust of the streets! How low and peaceful and full of sweetness would be the song of the river that the road reaches and leaves behind again on its long, long journey! And in the end to come to some secluded hamlet, far, far away from the dust and strife, and rest awhile under tall trees and dream dreams wherein all things were tinged with rose and gold.

So I thought of the road's miles of wandering, and my heart hungered for the roads I had travelled in the past. I longed to be back again, with the blue sky above, the fresh breezes of the countryside fanning my cheeks, and the long, untrodden road before me unfolding fresh scenes and new delights at every turn, behind a shoulder of a hill, and at every sweep through the broad tree-fringed meadows

There was the road of a summer afternoon, I remember, that wound onward through the valley and then climbed to the windy hills. I would go back to it now if I could; go back to where it lay wide and white before me with the summer pastures on either hand; back to the grey, old bridge which carried the road over the blue and white and gold river—blue fallen from the cloudless sky, white with the foam that bubbled round the rocks, gold from the beams of the burning sun.

Yes, I would go back again, and look from the valley over the copses to where the road curved swiftly over the far-away moorland. I would wonder again what lay beyond, my heart would leap for the unexplored land that lay behind the boundaries of the moun-

tains, and my feet hurry over the stones under the hot sun, impatient to be there. But were I to go back to-day half the joy would be gone, for now I should know the country that then I had not yet journeyed into. And still, I would go. Ah, I remember so well the rushing of the mountain streams as I went up into the hills that rose above the little grey town that was the metropolis of this succession of secluded valleys in North Yorkshire. And then the wide moorland and the road, away in the distance, sweeping over the heath, till at last it disappeared over the verge of a new dale.

Even then the road still went on, through quaint old brown villages with straggling streets steeped in the summer sunshine, by fields of emerald green, and beneath trees drooping and whispering of the gentle breeze amid sleeping leaves—on towards the mountains again, which ever rose away on before

And then I left the road for awhile, and rested in a garden of roses, amid a land of silvery waterfalls. It was in early June, and the briers were at the height of their blooming. There was one place above the river where for whole acres there seemed to be nought else

but the petals of pink and white, budding upon the thorny bushes or showered upon the soft grass beneath.

Above the summer green, the grey rocky walls of the ravine towered, and below I heard the impetuous river dashing over innumerable falls gleaming silver in the sunlight here, boiling with foam intensely white at the fall, and then flowing darkly under overhanging rocks, the silent, unrippled, gloomy surface, concealing treacherous depths far beyond the reach of the afternoon sun. Often one found on the uplands that rolled towards the mountains from the edge of the ravine a flower that is called the rock rose, growing in great numbers, and golden as the sunlight, till it seemed as if the sward were carpeted with gold.

And I remember, too, in a sheltered cleft among the rocks, coming upon the last of the primroses, pale, beautiful flowers of the spring, but whose petals now seemed wan and colourless, amid the glowing summer hues.

And at last I had to go back to the road again—one always has to do that, in the end, for the road has never done its journeying, and it leads both backwards and forwards at once.

And this time, for me, the road led backwards over the guardian barrier of the mountains, and I was sorry, for I had to leave the rose-garden above the waterfall, bathed in the dew and sunlight of a golden morning. I wonder if it is there still. Some day I will take to the road of a summer afternoon again, and I will go and see.

I remember, too, a road that passed through the stillness of an evening-shadowed land. There is something so strange about the road in the dusk of evening; it never turns behind a hill, nor sweeps through a meadow, nor follows the curve of the river; it simply stretches away before you till it becomes in the distance no longer a road, but melts into the shadows that are falling with the sunset upon the land. And though the shadows never draw nearer, still the road always fades into them in front, and there comes the thought of infinite wandering along a grey highway of dreams.

This is the spirit of the road, this thought of an endless journey, for no road ever comes to an end. Whether it leads into the heart of a great city or to some rocky fastness of the mountains,

there is always a re-starting, a continuance, a setting forth out into the world again.

Sometimes when I was a little earlier on the road than usual, and the dusky shadows only fringed the far side of the fields, there was seen behind the sombre winter trees that interwove their strong, gnarled branches and their delicately-outlined twigs into a filmy network, the ruddy glow of sunset hovering above the unseen horizon line. And an hour afterwards, when the road left the grey vistas of the valley, and I had climbed the hilly steeps scattered with country houses nestling amid protecting woods, towards the breezy moorland, there was still that sunset glow lingering intensified and idealised, when all the valleys below had become the abodes of the shadows. Above the long, low outline of the dark western hill the crimson glowed, with the sound of a great, deep chord of music echoing from the liquid colour.

The sky darkened from blue to violet, wherein the stars made tiny points of trembling gold ; but the depth of the violet hue lightened as the heavens curved towards the sunset amid the evening's intense silence. Such a peace lin-

gered in the hill-guarded solitude that I longed for noiseless footsteps, so that the silent calm might be wholly and completely consummated and my inmost spirit might entirely enter into the unknown mystery, so strange and yet so full of the peace that passeth human understanding.

On that evening the earth was as silent as the brooding sky; even the tongues of the merry mountain rills were unheard, for the frost held them fast in his icy thongs. Above the crimson over the mountain summits, the sky was of ethereal azure, that seemed to swim in the last reflection of the sunken sun's beams of gold; and there in the midst of the western ocean-sky, the radiant star of eve gleamed softly in the dying daylight above the shadow armies that were stealing down from the night.

When all the host of stars came out, my thoughts were no longer of the road, but of a mazy pathway winding through the spangled sky; but now, when I see the stars, it is of the moorland road that I think again and re-traverse it in my dreams.

Yet another road comes up out of the misty memory of dreams, bright and glowing as the

morning. It can hardly be called a road ; it is really a country lane, leading amongst sequestered vales between quiet, sleepful villages, and walked upon by a people who do not hurry and thrust each other rudely aside as do the people of the town pavements. I can see it all again now—the winding lane between the high hedges and the sparkle of the sunlight through the green leaves, which dappled the narrow roadway with shade and gold. I can hear the rustling in the overhanging branches where the birds sang of the glory of the world. I can see the rank grass and the flowers in the hedgeside in rich luxuriance and the clear ripple of the brook that ran right across the road.

Through the hedge the meadows sloped down to the placid river that flowed away down the long valley, past the great hill in the distance, that looked so stern and impassable from the gentle, green lane. In the haytime the sun-browned grass stood ready for the mowers ; a few hours' work under the hot sun and then the meadows flashed again with the pristine spring-time emerald re-created in July. They brought the yellow-brown hay along the lane to the village barns in great carts that were

almost smothered with the dry heaped-up grass. Somehow those loads never seemed mere dry grass to me. I always thought of the summer sunlight that had browned and burned it being stored up to give light and life in days when the sun shone no longer and the earth was frost-bound and cold and unkind to her creatures.

It will be there still, that dear old lane, I know. The bird-songs will be ringing out from amongst the leaves the same as ever ; the same sun will be pouring down golden light upon the meadows ; the gentle river will be flowing beneath the same banks towards the distant hill. All will be the same, the grass and the flowers by the roadside too, and the ivy creeping up the oak's sturdy trunk. It is only I who am different ; it is only I who am no longer there.

But some day I will go back there too, and see it all again. And they will wait for me—the sun and the birds, and the flowers.

The road of the dawning will ever in my mind lead upwards from a valley shrouded with the dark and dank night-mists to a hill in the east that looked towards the sunrise. The shadows

lay low over meadow and stream, and the houses in the village were silent, and the windows closed to the cold morning air, like the eyes of the people who slept within.

And I remember how the sunrise came over the shoulder of the great hill that reared out of the shadows, and how the mists fled from the mountains as the rosy dawn stole into the sky and the stars faded, like the shadows before the warm glow of the coming day. Long before it reached down into the valley the sunlight flooded the hills. The fleecy clouds burned crimson in a sky of liquid azure, and below the moor-birds were crying from the recesses of the shadows on the hillside, and the grey misty road crept on over the moorland till it passed into the horizon of glowing colour that shone above the heather and the rough mountain grasses.

But when I went back to the valley the clouds still lay unpenetrated by the sun that gleamed over the summits of the hills, and all was grey and dim and cheerless. And so it has often been in my experience. It is so often dark and dreary and overcast with clouds in the valley, when if we would only look up

the happy sun is shining on the hills, joyous with the coming of the morning. You do not know the world unless you leave the valleys sometimes, and go to the uttermost heights; if you keep your eyes always downwards amid the mists and darkness, how can you see the gold of the shadowless sunlight dawning over sapphire hills?

Often as I climbed the grey road at the day-break I wished that the road would go for ever upwards, nearer and nearer to that glorious light. I stretched out my arms to the golden heavens where the crimson clouds were. Something of the sun's brightness I took into my heart, and my own spirit entered into the peaceful beauty of the morning sky. It was as if I was lifted on the wings of the morning breeze above the highest of the hills. I was no longer of the earth, and in those golden moments I knew not the road that wound away, the cold hills, nor the valley below. My thoughts were the thoughts of the free wind, my spirit was the spirit of the dawning, I was one with the soul of the burning sun.

Ah! We were friends, the great earth and I, on those days of my road-wanderings. And

somehow it seems as if we have always been so. Many and many a time from the summit of the eastward-watching hill have I seen the dawn rise rosy out of the grey mists, and set the sky and the world a-glowing, and ever since the first morning I remember the earth and I have been friends.

And before that, some time away back in the years that I do not remember, it seems as if we have been friends, too; so that had I never seen the dawning before, and were I to see it for the first time to-morrow, it would be like going back to something that was familiar, something I had known well long ago, and that had become so dear to me that it was part of myself almost. And when I go back to the sun and the hills and the river we shall be friends again—old, old friends. But most of all, I think, I shall be friends with the roads who take me out into the glory of the world.

The Meadow

V

ALL-GLORIOUS with shimmer and sheen of glistening gold is the meadow in the buttercup time. The burnished cup-flowers stand in their teeming thousands erect in the thick, green grass, drinking in deeply the sunshine that is brighter than even they are.

The sunshine breathes the magic spirit of life into all the countless forms that flourish lavishly, crowding every single inch between the hedgerow borders of the meadow-plot; into the deep, rich grass that hides the fruitful earth beneath a carpet of green sweeter and softer than the richest velvet, daily growing deeper as the sunny days grow longer; into the peeping daisies, who gaze from the grass up and away into the heights of the azure heavens, and see the sky bend down its calm, inscrutable smile to meet their thousand upturned eyes; into the sturdy heads of the red clover, which

give a deeper under-hue between the grass and the glittering gold of the buttercups ; into the myriad leaves of the hedgerow thickets and of the taller trees that stand at the edge of the little plantation and hearken all day long to the streamlet's laughter.

The great earth drinks deeply of the summer sunshine, and her being is bathed in the summer's warmth and light. Beyond the near hedge, over in the pasture where there is a break in the ground, the rich red soil shows amid the green, and the sunbeams fall upon it in a stream of liquid light, and are absorbed into the texture of the earth. It is as if one could veritably see the life-giving light and warmth entering the very core of the earth's existence ; as if one could feel the deep, long respirations as the land inhaled the glowing breath of the summer. All the earth drinks in the summer and the sunshine, and the buttercups drink, too, deep and long, as they stand in their golden crowds all over the face of the meadow.

It is the time when the earth is entering into her summer heritage—the glorious heritage of the sunshine and the profusion of all the

flowers of the summer. There is the hum of summer in the air—that faint, indefinite undersong distinct from all tangible sounds—from the bird-songs, the rustle of the myriad leaves, the whisper of the fresh, springing grass swayed in the crooning breezes, the cool ripple of the river, the pure, clear laughter of the brook—the low, sweet, dim tone that sounds from no one knows where—is it the soul-song coming from the great, deep heart of the earth herself?

There is the scent of summer in the breezes coming over the glittering green and gold of the meadow—coming from the hedgerows of hawthorn overflowing with the scent and the essence of summer itself, till the grass all around is strewn with the delicate sweet-smelling petals; from the sweet brier bushes where the June roses are budding with little flashes of white and little flushes of crimson amid the green leaves and the young thorn-sprays.

As it floats upon its unseen way, passing through the invisible paths of the ether, the wind touches all the flowers of the fields and the hedges and the gentle, quiet lane sides, gathers something of their sweetness and bears it along on its wings, as the bee brings the sweet

spoils from the flowers adhering to his hairy coat.

A little of the flowers' pure loveliness the wind leaves for me—a few gentle thoughts of their sweetness, their beauty, their happiness, their joy in the new-found summer sunshine. The thought falls restfully upon the mind like a tender blessing. The dulness and the care and the worry of the days of toil, the impure darkness of the atmosphere of the cities, are washed clean away by the passing of the wind and the falling of the fair, pure sunlight. I think I feel more as the flowers feel—the joy of the life and the wealth of summer.

There is no joy in all the universe that can equal this. The very hours—the restless, moving, travel-worn hours—stand still in the meadow in the time of summer. Here is an earthly immortality—no measurement of moments, hours, or days, only the pure joy of life, of being, of existing—an unconsciousness of all that moves, that journeys wearily, that is unresting. I live like the flowers, only for the beauty of the sunshine that sinks deeply into the very soul of all things, breathing the spirit of immortal joy ; for the tender caresses

of the low, soft wind that wafts its thoughts into the human mind, as it does its sweetness upon all the flowers and grasses of the earth, with a holy gentleness.

There is no more the passing of Time. Here in the meadow the grim old scythe-bearer himself halts upon his weary journey and lays him down to rest awhile. And though the spell may be broken somehow, and his keen scythe resume its grim work cutting down the grasses and the flowers of the years, his blade can never touch nor destroy the immortal thoughts of the loveliness of this summer hour in the meadow when the buttercups bloom goldenly. What though old Time on his journey leave behind him barren years, faded hopes, crumbling ruins, broken nations? There are some things he cannot wither, nor blast, nor destroy. Joy at least is beyond the reach of his keen knife, and the memory of it he cannot touch. The memory of it shall be everlasting, though all else fall dark and dead.

There is the wealth of the summer in the meadow—wealth beyond all count or measure or understanding. The buttercups are full of it, drawn from the depths of the earth, from

the heights of the sky—nay, from the far sea, too, where the wind comes from. All the sweetness of the earth, all the life that the falling rain from the sky gives, the essence of the pure, refreshing breezes, the buttercups take secretly, silently, to themselves, in their own good time—and, lo ! it is turned to gold. So rich are the buttercups that if one walks among them they shower the golden dust upon one's feet till they are yellow with its hue. Profusely, lavishly, open-handedly, the buttercups give their wealth—gold that is sweeter than all the gold of the cities, untainted with man's greed.

This is the summer spirit, investing all the earth with richness and beauty and the glory and the fulness of life. Here is no constraint, no stinting, no hoarding of this universal wealth. Every one may take of it freely—as freely as it is given, with a freedom known not of men. Here every one, everything possessing the mysterious germ of life has enough, and the enough is a feast inexhaustible beyond conception. Stretch the imagination to its utmost limit, and you cannot make it contain all the generosity, all the fulness of the

summer. Each bird that cleaves the air, the full-songed thrush, the melodious blackbird, the tireless swallows that sweep and flit unwearyingly over the meadow, the little brown sparrows on the barn roof, all have enough of life, the fulness of the earth, the glad freedom of a sorrowless existence; each thing that grows, from the heaviest tree, with its trunk feet thick, to the slender-stemmed, golden-faced buttercups, have all the sunshine, all the sweetness of the summer to themselves; and the same wind blows over them all.

Oh, pale peoples of the cities, who strive and scrape meanly and pitifully for poor, dry crumbs of life, and lose your souls in the scramble, look! Look, and see if the birds and the flowers of the meadow are not wiser than you all—wiser than your dusty books, wiser than all your long centuries behind you. Look, and see if you are not all wrong. Look, and see if your thoughts are not vain, if your ideals are not substanceless mirages, if your schemes and plans are not baseless, tottering things, if the sordid gold you scramble for is not ashes and dust, not as the gold of the buttercups is, drawn from the essence of the

earth's sweetness and beauty, purified and refined into colour and light and life.

Day after day, so long and sunny, that each hour, each moment seems longer drawn out, fuller of sunshine, of sweet winds, as the summer moves onward to its zenith. As the sky grows more full of sunshine, so the earth grows more full of the wealth of life; the flowers come more thickly in the quiet lanes, climbing up to the height of the hedges in places, more and more every day; the scent of the summer on the winds grows more rich, the young birds have flown from the nests, the foliage of the tall trees becomes more massed, the hum of summer deepens in the air, the grass rises and rises higher and thicker every hour in the meadow. All things work towards one end—the fulness and wealth of life.

The hot sun burns in the sky pouring beams of glaring heat down, down on to the pulsing earth, scorching the grass and the tender flowers till the refreshing rain comes and sweetens all things again; and anon the air grows sultry and the sullen thunder mutters in the blue-black clouds, and the lightning crackles and flares down the sky. The storm

passes and the life is refreshed, renewed, the green things look more green, the parched flowers hold up their heads and drink the sunshine anew. The pink and white rose-petals fall among the lengthening grass, the meadow-sweet fills the air with rich and languorous scent. The bees hum across the sky, busy among the endless, endless flowers. The swallows still shoot to and fro over the sunlit meadow, never, never still, so full are they of the gladness and the joy of the summer.

So long as the summer lasts the swallows can never tire; they must drink the cup of life to the very depths, exultant, joyful, free as the wayward winds. The swallows are the physical embodiment of the spirit of summer, all the glowing fervent joy of existence concentrated between their tiny tireless wings. To and fro, to and fro, all the happy day long glancing down the sunbeams, swifter than the wind. Life and joy to the uttermost fulness, the very spirit of it embodied in the possession of a perfect physical ability.

The grass in the meadow lengthens, deepens, thickens, ripens. The first glory of the buttercups is gone. They are there still amid the

universal increase, but the well-nigh unbroken sheen of gold that shone in the first sweet days of summer is lost in the irresistible rush of the grass, drawn up by the magic of the sun as the tides of the sea are drawn by the moon.

The tide of summer is at the flood. In the glare of the noon the birds are silenced by the fulness of the summer's life. The grass ripens under the scorching beams, then grows ruddy at the tips ; a faint reddish-purple glow suffuses the face of the meadow, yet there is still the deep green beneath and the buttercups are scattered in stars of gold ; the life blood of the earth reddens in her veins. The azure arch of sky is unbroken by a single cloud ; no cooling breeze now stirs among the tree-tops nor passes over the heat-soaked meadow like the sound of a gentle sigh ; the passionate sun pours his ardent beams upon the bosom of the voluptuous unresisting earth.

This is the July summer at mid-day. A hush lies over all the fields, and in the woods the rustle of a single leaf as a stray wisp of a breeze strikes it is heard plainly amid the silence. The brook itself is caught and wrapped in the all-surrounding heat, its waters

spun out to a fine thread of silver, and its voice a thin trickle of sound deep down in the tangled undergrowth. For the rest there is but the dim deep undertone of the heat-hum, and the distant hills lie slumbrously in the haze, which seems to be veritably quivering with the almost visible rays of the intense heat. The tenderest flowers shrink from the beating sun, and are only refreshed by the heavy night dews which drench the fields in silver spray. At night the mist rises from the river, and the deepest part of the valley is enshrouded with damp, clammy moisture, which does not pass away until the dawn fills the far eastern void with light.

One morning, when the rays of the sun are yet level with the hills, and all the grasses and flowers of the meadow are weighted heavily with the dew, the gate leading from the roadway is opened, and men enter with a horse drawing the mowing machine with its twisted cranks and skeleton wheels. As the sun climbs towards the zenith, the circling knives flashing in the brilliant light go rattling round the meadow, and the ruthless blades cut deep and low at the slender stalks, and leave behind

the swathes lying prone upon the brilliant dewy emerald of the under grass.

The day goes on, and another and another, the hot sun beats down hour by hour, the sunburnt men with rakes and forks turn and return the low lain grass, till at last the sun has done his final work, the grass lies dry and stiff, and the sweet odour of the hay fills the air and floats away upon the breeze. Then the carts come rumbling over the shorn meadow, and are piled high with the dry, rustling hay.

And so along the quiet lanes all the stored-up sweetness of the summer, the warmth and light of the sun, the produce of the fertile earth, goes by to the shadowy barns, where the brown sparrows still chirp and flutter, and the swallows come in at night wheeling and darting from the fields to their mud-built nests under the eaves.

Winter Days

VI

SOMETIMES on the winter mornings I have set out from a little village along the road that leads over the hills, before the cold gleaming of the dawn has yet crept into the sky. Often my steps are under the starlight and the golden crescent of the waning moon, hung between enfolding clouds, gives the promise of a bright morning. But not seldom I am disappointed of that, for the clouds grow only heavier and greyer, and the wan daybreak when it comes looks over drear, cold hills streaked with the snow of yesterday. Still, it is worth while being out, for to be out of doors, whatever the season, means to be closer to Nature than our ugly towns ever allow us to be, and to be close to Nature means to be close to the only thing in the world that is abiding and unchanged either by the drifting storms of centuries or by the little cares of life.

Many and many a time as I have climbed the

hill in the grey winter morning I have laughed to think what some of those abed in the town would think either of my thoughts or my wanderings. First of all, I am perfectly sure they would not even consider the proposition I would make to them. And even if they did, what then? Well, on one side there is the cosy bed in the warm room; on the other, the winding road through the bleak moorland, covered with drifting snow, with the east wind striving and biting a way through one's overcoat and clothing. You prefer the bed and the room? Oh, well, I thought as much. Maybe I did myself at one time; maybe—nay, surely—I shall be forced to choose it again; but may that day be long in coming.

But for all that, you do not know what life is, you who lie there sleeping away these mornings that shall never return. For you there will never be a thrill of the frost-bound road beneath and the crispness of the newly fallen snow untrodden save by the wild creatures of the open air.

Here comes a little flock of sheep down the pathway, gazing in the grey dawning at a wanderer so early upon the road. Why,

even they are feeling more of life than you! There scampers a little brown rabbit, half-merrily, half-fearfully across my path, leaving his queer, little footprints to track him if one had time—is not he happier far than you, sleeping dully and heavily this cold, cheerless (as you say) winter morning? Here again are the tiny, frail markings of birds' feet half-way across the road and then stopping short suddenly as the little owner of them flew quickly away at the sound of my approach—what need to compare the lightsome fleetness of its wings to your drowsy slumbers?

And what of myself, hidden away among the rolling hills with the glistening snow wreaths twining round the clefts and crevices with the cold, grey dawn creeping slowly between the ragged edges of the driving clouds, and struggling with the reluctant shadows of the night to reach down to the cold earth and breathe into her a little of the warmth of the hidden sun and a little of the light of the veiled heavens—what worth were it to me, at least, to compare my lot to yours? Yours is all closed in, fettered by walls, crushed by roofs. Mine is open to the light of heaven, even though it be

but the grey dawn of a winter day; mine knows no roof but the lowering sky; mine is free as the mountain winds, glorious as the flight of a bird.

When the sweet-scented breezes of summer have blown their last across the emerald fields, and the sad autumn leaves have fallen trembling and reluctant from the wind-racked branches, all the beauty of the earth's life is not yet fled. Nor does it ever go, for it is the beauty of Nature, which is abiding. It is the fashion, however, nowadays, to abuse winter; but those who do it most are the town-dwellers, who do not know anything about the real winter. Their towns are ugly and their streets comfortless in winter, they say; but their towns are always ugly and comfortless, whatever the season, only in a different way.

I like the winter for many reasons. Beauties hidden in the richness of the summer meadows are revealed in the open fields, the bare hedgerows, and the clear air, and more especially is this so in the woods. No longer are the branches embowered in living green, nor through the myriad leaves does the sunlight play in mazed dances; instead there are the

mysterious mists rising between the gaunt trunks, and softening with pearl their hard and sombre shapes. The stately fir soars upward from the silent earth and carries with it the mind, straight to its crest and to the freedom of the sky above. The gnarled oak's twisted branches overshadow the dead, brown leaves, and through them there shivers a ghostly rustle as of a last breath before death.

And above and around everywhere is the intricate tracery of the pencilled branches tapering from the sturdy, stout timber of the trunk into a myriad tiny points at the tips of the outermost twigs. In the depths of the wood it is almost still, save for that eerie rustle among the leaves ; but on the edge where the trees face the wind-swept moorland they toss and moan nearly all the day through, and the wind comes in great sighs through the branches, like the travail of some troubled spirit.

And then there is the winter night after the first fall of snow. As soon as ever the snow comes I am waiting impatiently for the moment when I can leave the town and set off over the hills. I think of other winters—now passed into the memories of the gathered years—and

imagine how the hills will look this winter, where the drifts will be highest, and where the mountain springs will be festooned with glittering icicles and overhung with cornices of snow. But, as has always been the case, the imagination is not the reality.

These pictures of the imagination never are true really. I remember once being told of a village in the North Riding of Yorkshire, in the midst of rolling fell-land and valleys, where the streams tumbled over many waterfalls down rocky gorges, and out of the materials of the description of my friends I built up a picture of the village and the valleys. Then a year or two afterwards I went to the village and sat by the noisy waterfalls, and wandered over the heather-clad hills, and from the height of steep limestone scars overlooked a mountain ravine of marvellous beauty, and rejoiced all the while in the flood of golden sunlight; but the place that was of actual existence and the place of my imagination's painting were distinct and separate. Sometimes I wonder if I shall ever go to that place of my imagination, wonder whether it really exists and by some unknown process has been imaged in my brain,

or whether it is but a self-created scene of "such stuff as dreams are made of."

And in this case of the winter snow my imagination is no more true to reality. The reason, I think, is this. Nature is so wonderfully versatile that her effects are never arranged twice in exactly the same manner. When you see the same scene a second time, there is always something different about it, something there that you did not notice before, or something lacking that you remembered. And this constant difference is more plainly to be noticed in winter than in the other seasons, or at any rate it strikes one more deeply.

In this way I always look on winter as teaching more clearly the vastness of Nature. Somehow I always learn more and think more in winter; it tells of the immense assortment of things there are waiting to be discovered and studied and thought over in one little secluded English valley. It tells so plainly, too, of the miracle that is wrought throughout the earth year after year, century after century, and yet is heeded not as anything miraculous—the wonder of the changing seasons. As I walk along the moorland road sometimes I

pass a little well where starts a thread-like stream which at last finds its way down to the valley yonder to join the seaward hurrying river.

By the side of the spring is a little bank of lawn-like grass, and one day last summer I remember lying there for hours under a warm glowing sun, dreaming of the mystery of all this beauty. There was a gentle breeze stirring through the heather, and now and again I heard the drone of a passing bee. (I remember the bee's hum so well, because it seemed so full of the lazy, sweet richness of the summer.)

Now the grassy bank lies cold under the snow, and icicles hang from the lips of the well. How shall the summer sweetness ever return? How shall the bee come back to the heather bells and the water trickle coolly down the purple hillside into the green valley beyond? And yet I know these things will come back, as surely as to-day the snow lies glistening on the mountains. That is a thought from winter.

In the summer, the beautiful, happy, golden summer, I was content to stay there and never think about what was to come or what had

gone, content to linger unthinking with the sweetness of the sunlit present and look not to the time when the trees would be bare and the hills drear and cold, and the birds silent, and the valley clothed in sombre sleep-garments. But now, from the greyness of this winter morning, I look forward and backward at the same time, and with the thought of that summer day of the past, I feel the dawning of the new spring which shall bring the summer to the fulness of its beauty again.

Come back with me again to the star-lit night-tide, when the winter snow lies weirdly far away upon the distant hills. The winter night is full of mystery, but here again there is something that is different ; something that will be new to you who take the country road only on the days when the sun is shining and the winds are fair. If you are to see anything of the hidden beauties of Nature it is not only on the bright days that you must go out to her, but when the skies are grey, and in the dark of night also. The winter night is full of the mystery of all nights, but its mystery is far different from that of the summer night. The summer night is richly, sweetly mystical, as all

summer things are ; it is warm and glowing, even though it is night ; the breath of summer's sweetness lingers till the stars peep out over the miles of shadowland.

But the winter night's mystery is cold and weird ; not repellent, but queer, ghostly shadows and sounds linger everywhere and play merry little tricks on your imagination. The wind rushes over the shoulder of the hill and howls at you, and then speeds off across the moorland again, laughing in great gusts ; the trees sigh and toss restlessly, and their great branches droop over the road with long, writhing, grasping fingers ; the reflection of the uncertain light upon the snow plays strange tricks with the sight, counterfeiting the pale gleam of some ghostly moonlight, when the moon is still far below the horizon ; the wind sweeping along the road gathers up the snow-flakes, and there is an elfish rustle in the filled-up ditches as if the little winter fairies were playing there.

Down in the valley the winking lights of the village are burning, and though the night sounds of the winter are echoing and rustling around me, I know that I am still in the arms

of our great mother earth, who, besides her wastes of mountains and moorland, has also the shelter of the peaceful homesteads of her children.

Then one day in the winter you will see that the snow has melted, the frost has gone, a fresh wind from the fragrant south is blowing over our cold northern land, and it seems to bear upon its breezes a little of the sweetness of the far-off summer. And you will notice on the bare hedgerows the first signs of the leaf-buds, and perhaps you may hear a thrush piping. And then, although it is still winter, the spring will leap into your heart. Come what may now, whether the frost's keen grip shall descend upon the earth again to-morrow, or cold winds blow through the bare trees, it does not matter. In your thoughts now dwells the breath of spring. It entered at the sight of the tiny swellings on the branches and at the sound of the thrush's song.

On such a day I am writing this, in a room within the town. It is a day of marvellous beauty, with sunlight of intense gold. It is falling upon the page as I write at my window, and I cannot write any longer. The flood of

dazzling light makes my writing such a weak, dull thing that I have no patience to continue. I must go out into the open air, and let these golden rays sink into my heart. It was winter yesterday, and for days before that—the utmost depth of cold, blustering winter, with bitter winds and driving showers of rain and hail and snow. (Ah! the golden glint of the sunlight on the roofs below is good to see.)

But to-day the sun is shining as it has never shone before this year. In the country the air will be full of the sound of rushing streams, and there will be the brown hills, with the winding road between, and the unutterable feeling of freedom that the wild winds bring. I would I were there.

The World Wanderers

VII

IN the midst of a broad and fertile valley, through meadows of rich and green luxuriance, there flow the placid waters of a stately river. Between its source far away up amongst the limestone heights and its mouth that lies beyond the westward hills, whose summits look down over the long-stretching cornfields to the silver line on the far-distant horizon which betokens the wandering waves of the sea, many bridges carry across its waters the white roads that wind up and down and to and fro in the valley.

One bridge there is, a little way out from an old grey town where the atmospheres of ancient and modern days are strangely mingled ; for above the trim station through which thunderous express trains frequently whirl along the level railway track, there rises above the clustered houses and the narrow streets climbing up the face of a gentle hill a scarred and hoary

castle keep, whose stones have been worn and crumbled by the clutching fingers of the years. And behind the ancient castle the hill, that is more ancient than all, rears its huge, majestic form to the summit that is brooding and thoughtful because of the memories of uncountable centuries.

By the bridge the river murmurs the thoughts of the waters that have flowed for ever, to the woodland leaves whose lives only began in the spring of yesterday, and will end in the chill winds of to-morrow's autumn—age and youth mingling their thoughts and voices in the wind beneath the eternal sunlight and the stars.

Eight miles away, along the road that goes out between the moorland and the sky, there is another valley, another river, and another bridge. The valley is narrower, and the hills rise steeply out of the peaceful fields; yet there are winding lanes of wondrous greenness, banks of primrose flowers, hedges of hawthorn, pink and white, and slumbrous woods where the ferns grow green and tall under the cool shade of the boughs. The river is younger here. It is not so long since it was only a rushing mountain stream—the impetuous childhood of

river life. There is more of laughter in its voice than in that of its brother eight miles away. It is yet in the hurry of youth—rushing away to the far-off estuary, and hearing even here amongst its parent hills the call of the ocean. It will go more slowly by-and-by.

It will see the things that are beautiful by its banks, and will want to linger a little while among the meadows, and will wind in and out among the reeds, trying to make its course towards the sea a little longer. And it will be more thoughtful then and speak of greater, deeper things, more like the great ocean billows which it already hears beating on the shore.

They are favourite haunts of mine, the two bridges and the road that leads in between. I often come to them by way of the railway and the old grey town yonder. There are people who resent the intrusion of the railroad into the sacred domain of Nature. Sometimes I am inclined to do so myself; for too often in the past the advent of the iron road into a district hitherto untraversed by that highway of men has brought in a few years grim factories, smoky chimneys, and all the hideous paraphernalia of the town. But in this valley of

mine the railroad has been a benefactor rather than an unwished-for intruder. It has known precisely where to throw off the dust of the town, and for the most part its journey up the valley has been made without sullying the fair prospects of a beautiful land. For miles and miles it winds through meadow and woodland, past quiet villages aglow with flowers and sunshine, and under the shadow, almost, of the eternal hills.

I can forgive the railway the beginnings of a town or two here and there, if only for the country that it takes me to afterwards. By its means I can be translated in an hour from the afternoon and the clamorous noises of the streets to this roadway over the bridge, where I now linger in the twilight. Were it not for the railway I should have the toilsome walk over the hot pavements and through the dull and dreary suburbs ere I could see the sunlight in the fields and taste the sweet air of the hills ; whereas now a humble shilling will buy for me a seat in an enchanted coach that whirls me in an instant from the turmoil of the town, to the sweet woods, the hills, the streams, and the peace of the world.

No ! Nature lover as I am, impatient of the city's endless toil and hurry, hater of the modern spirit with all its artificiality and love of hectic excitement in business and in pleasure, despiser of the increasing tendency to rush and hustle from place to place, seeing many things but observing nothing, who only wish to linger amongst the recesses of some green and shady lane, and am content to be a humble, unhurried walker, dreaming as my feet make lingering steps in the quiet bye-ways—yet I cannot but thank the railway, sometimes.

Ah ! There is the joy of life by the bridge here all day long when the sunlight is upon the river, and there are restful thoughts and murmurous sounds when the shadows are coming at the closing of the afternoon. There's a rustling of the wind among the branches, and there's the calling of the birds ; there's the zephyr-rippled water and the trembling of the reeds at the cold marge of the river ; there's the wood growing dark and mysterious on the bank yonder, the green summer foliage above, and the grave of last autumn's poor dead leaves, overgrown with rank grass and lighted by the bluebells—all becoming as one grey

shadow as the night-tide comes ; there's the last light of the sunset away down towards the sea, where the river is going soon ; there's the great hill rising mightily above the old castle of the town and all the little things below, as the pile of its years towers mighty above the lives of men and man-made things ; and soon there's the pale orb of the moon gliding like a ghost through the cloud-shadows of the heavens. . . .

And then the moon is mightier than all, mightier even than the towering hill, for she is over all and in all, and holds all fast enchanted in her silvery spell. Even the river, that is undisturbed by aught else, and continues flowing placid and oblivious to any power that may linger near its banks, is enchanted by the moon, and becomes a new thing. The silver gleam alights silently upon the ripples and becomes endowed with the movement like the water—moonlight and water and shadow mingled in a silvery movement ; and there's a silver shimmering pathway leading over the water from the depths of the shadows under the bridge to those other shadows deep and dark under the trees.

And on that other river away over the moorland there is another pathway over the waters being traced by the moon—

Wherever the beat of her unseen feet,
Which only the angels hear,
May have broken the woof of my tent's thin roof

—the roof of the cloud-tent far in the heavens. I know it will be there, for I have seen it many and many a time. And on that distant ocean, too, there is yet another pathway where the great rollers are breaking from the long horizon under the stars.

The calm rivers, lakes, and seas,
Like strips of the sky fallen thro' me on high
Are each paved with the moon and these.

The road from the bridge leads up to the moorland, where the winds blow all night long in their unearthly freedom. The wind is one of the wanderers of the world.

The road and the river are others, but the wind is freer than them all. The road wanders far and wide and sees many strange things; but he can only wander where he is guided by the hands of those who made him and the feet of those who bear him company. The river, too, is a wanderer—a wanderer among pleasant

pastures and sweet woodlands, but even the river for the most part must only go along the way that he made for himself long ages ago. But the wind bloweth where he listeth. There was never such freedom as his. There never will be. Earth has not her tracks for him, nor her boundaries. Between star and star he can race, from the world to the sun leap at a single bound, and beyond that, for aught I know.

And yet though the mountains cannot bar his course nor the wandering seas prevent his journeying, and though he is more free than the uttermost star, the wind is kindly withal, and will come down in gentle breezes upon the world and, blowing from the fragrant south, awaken the spring in the valleys. He is cold and stern and angry sometimes, I know; but we can forget his withering rage for the sake of his gentleness in spring and summer days.

Sometimes I have thought that I should like to follow the wind in his unutterable freedom, on his wanderings from land to land, ocean to ocean, planet to planet. But he is too great and too distant a traveller for such as I who love to wander in the sheltered loneliness

of green and shady vales, and can find travelling enough in a few miles of the open road. The wind would take me too far upon his immortal journeying. Soon I should grow weary for this dear world again.

The road, too, is no mean wanderer, but, being a way that is ever followed by the feet of mankind, he is not so unimpeachably immortal as the wind. The road is of the earth, and goes amongst the earth's sweetest things. You can follow the road for many and many a mile, and yet there are always by your side the things you know. There are the flowers sparkling and dew-impearled among the grasses in the hedgerows ; the sight of the distant hills, with faint-blue summits, seeming almost as far away as the sky ; and the road goes on and on until it climbs the hills and you look down upon the green and fertile valleys.

But all around, wherever the road may lead to, there is something that is homely and familiar—a rose-embowered cottage, a sun-lighted street between quaint village houses, the old hall embosomed within stately woods. And yet the road is as homeless as the wind. If there be a spirit of the road, as I think there

must be, then it is a spirit that has no resting-place. For the journey of the road has no ending. Look you along the road to the turn amongst the trees; that is not the end, it is but a new beginning; nor is the end where it passes out of sight over the crest of the hill, for there are other valleys that have yet to be traversed. Would I, too, become a world-wanderer like the wind, the road and the river?

There comes a point upon the moorland road that leads between the two bridges where I can see far away among the shadows in the valley the lights of village and farmstead glimmering in the silent night-tide, and then the home-love comes into my heart. Behind the lighted windows of those distant houses there are the great farm kitchens and the blazing fire, and the flickering light upon happy faces; each tiny light that glistens from the houses in the valleys means home to some other wanderer on the road than I. And for me, too, there is a light in yonder village, and some one who is waiting, and, perhaps, looking out into the night for me.

They are not all to me, these mountains and

valleys ; the sunlight would not be so bright without the look of loving eyes at the journey's end ; the music of the river would not be so sweet did it not echo a voice that will speak to me at the resting-time. And sometimes when the grey shadows are falling and the sun goes down I think the road, too, grows weary of his journeying and would fain turn towards the lighted windows and find some place where he might stay awhile. But, instead, his lot is still to keep on along his own inexorable track, leaving the village and the lights again out into the mysterious night.

And here under the arches of the bridge is that other wanderer of the world. The river, still flowing by, rippling and eddying, under the silver moonlight. And the river is of all the wanderers the dearest to the human heart ; this, I think, because in the end after all his miles of wandering he has a home in the far-away ocean.

> Even the weariest river
> Winds somewhere safe to sea.

And so the river is always joyous, whether rushing along in youthful impetuosity in the childhood of the mountain streams or winding

its smooth and stately waters through the level meadows of the lowland country. The wind is free, but in the freedom of infinite wandering; the road has long and pleasant journeys, but the journeys never end; but the river, from the silver thread that twines between the heather on the hillsides down to the broad sands of the estuary, knows that the home of all rivers is awaiting him by the rolling ocean billows, and he is ever going there, and no power can stay or hinder him.

And though the river is so old, yet he is young also. I was reading one day of an ancient people with an intellect, an art, a culture and a civilisation as great as ours—a people whose dwelling was by the banks of another river, seven thousand years ago.

Seven thousand years!—and while the people lived and loved and died under the burning suns of Egypt, by the banks of the great Nile, my little English river was here then, flowing beneath shaggy forests and under the shadow of stern mountains. Seven thousand years ago!—and my little English river is as young to-day as when the long line of Pharaohs held their kingly sway over the

glory and splendour of the ancient world. Many changes has the river seen ; the stern, wild forest has gone, and now the gentle meadows bend their waving grasses over its brim ; the people go by over the bridge to the little country town through which the railway passes (I wonder if they ever think of these things ?) ; and I stand here over the murmuring waters, and I, too, seem seven thousand long years old as I think of that endless story.

Still the river laughs among the mountains, still it croons under the drooping branches of the woods, still it travels on its long, long journey down towards the sea, still the moonlight sleeps upon the waters. Greatest of all the wanderers of the world is the river. Seven thousand years has it travelled from the mountains to the ocean, and yet it is young.

The Street, Stars, and the Sea

VIII

FOR many days I have been trying to write. Half a dozen times have I sat down determined to commit my thoughts to paper before I rose again. As many times have I risen with the determination unfulfilled. To-night I resumed the attempt, and again has failure been my lot. In vain have I striven and wrestled for ideas and for the words by which they were to be conveyed to the minds of my readers; and the only result of two wasted hours is about a dozen sheets of ink-blotched paper. Not a line nor an idea worth a second's consideration.

I will give up the attempt. I will try no more to wrest thoughts and ideas from a befogged brain, and producing only muddled and beclouded words. It is a hopeless, wearisome sort of business altogether, and I will have no more of it. Two hours wasted. What might I not have done? And outside has

been the open sky, and the wet, fresh breeze, and the warm, loving sunset. I will stay no more here. I will go out and seek the open air, and feel the breath of the wind of the twilight that is calling out from the fading west.

Out from my quiet room into the whirling streets. Right and left, up and down, everywhere a whirl of noise and a maze of never-ending movement. A kaleidoscope in which the moving figures are human faces, ever changing, passing and repassing under the sickly wan glare of the spluttering arc lamps, just lighted as the twilight is approaching. Never still by any chance, even for the tiniest moments. As restless, as unutterably restless as unsatisfied spirits, yet full of laughter and chatter and noise and shouting. This is the street of any great town as the twilight is fading into the night and the huge factories have turned out their thousands of workers. I hate it all, and would have none of it if I could.

And yet one cannot blame them. Volatile human minds, capable of the endless expression and emotion of life, jammed and compressed within the steely limits of the great industrial

machine, all fitted in one common groove throughout the length of the day, they must have their freedom some time. So they get it in the streets—in the twilight when it is summer, under the arc lamps, with the faint glimmer of stars far above, in the winter. There at least is the open sky and the fringe of the fresh wind sweeping between the houses. So the people jostle and hurry by in a restless endeavour for freedom—revelling in the unrestful delight of sheer movement and noise of unmusical laughter.

Ah, well! Let them laugh, harsh and unmusical though it may sound. It's all they get, nearly, of the joy of life, these hours in the street. Well enough for me to sneer at their ways of finding pleasure, I am not crushed so deeply in the steel-bound machine as they are, and I have moments when I may look at sunsets and blue skies and dew-bedight meadows, and hear the birds sing, and feel the kiss of the azure-lipped sea on the gold-gleaming sand.

I know what my friend the Superior Person will say, even before it is uttered. They can all have these things if they will. Can they? But what if the machine crushes the

love for these things out of their lives? And where is there life without the love of the sea and the bird-songs and the blue sky, which is so glorious that it is a very delight to say the feeble words that mean it?

I think about these things vaguely and dreamily as I move through the whirling, moving throng in the street. They never seem to be going anywhere, these people. Perhaps some of them are serious and thoughtful, and have a definite end in view somewhere out away from this restless street, and somewhere out from the whirling throng in the great street of the world. Somewhere where there are quiet corners where one can sit and dream in the sun or under the drowsy stars; somewhere ——

On a sudden the still, quiet roadway, wrapped in the gauzy grey veil of the dim shadows of the twilight as it fades in the wan, cloud-overcast sky. All is calm and quiet and peaceful now, and a great content comes into the heart. The road goes on, on, fading into a grey mist before.

Ghostly, silent, formless shadows linger amongst the sternly dark tree trunks that mingle lovingly together in the whispering foli-

age above, and that seems the only sound in the darkening of the twilight. The tiny lights of scattered homesteads gleam far and wide over the rolling country that lies down towards the misty west ; and on the extreme verge of the shadowland is a group of huddled points of light that come from the streets of a distant town. And many a dark and deeper shadow between there and here tells of the dense, mysterious woodlands, whose hushful murmurs rise to the lowering sky.

The windy west is full of great black storm-clouds, and the rain will come soon. But the wind just now is asleep, and all is still as the twilight shadows grow deeper. My own foot-steps echo loudly on the hard surface of the road, and the single whistling call of some belated bird sounds across the meadow. These are the only sounds that break the void of silence beneath the grey sky. The clouds, heavy and threatening, pack closer and more threateningly, and their gloomy bulk is ever increased by others travelling from the unseen horizon. The grey of the evening twilight is on the verge of being enshrouded in the deeper shades of night.

And then just when the last grey gleam seems about to fade, the clouds low down in the west are parted, and I see a mystic doorway into the golden realms beyond the curtain of grey mist. It is the last of the unseen sunset, and, as I look, my eyes no longer see the greyness of the dusky twilight of the rainy night. There is only the heavenly glory flooding the wide, golden fields of the mystic cloudland that lies beyond the sight of earth. After all, the sun still shines, though sometimes we see it not. Behind the clouds there is ever as great a glory as the world has known. Though all seems dark and grey and hopeless, and the skies are but sad and weeping, somewhere, though it be beyond the clouds, there is the eternal glory of the golden sunlight. And, sooner or later, it will come back to the vision of the waiting earth again.

The winds of the west wake momentarily, and their unseen hands draw the cloud curtain back across the golden gates of the heavens. A little further along the road turns in under tall woodlands, where the deepest shadows of night suddenly descend upon the grey highway.

Far above the tall trees tower stately, and

on the road my footsteps sound in the depthless hush with such unwonted loudness that I stop under one of the deepest shadows, that the night's utter stillness may fall upon my heart. But over the wall by the roadside there is a mysterious hushing murmur with the shadows. A tiny wind breathes through the woodlands, and the leaves whisper a low answer. "Hush, ah, hush," then trembling tongues seem to say in their soft rustle, "Now rest we all, for is not the sweet night so near? Rest, ah, rest. Hush, hush"—and the sound dies away in a low, tremulous sigh.

The night is here. I am alone with the shadows. Stay, though, I am not alone. There is a tiny break in the clouds above the interlacing branches. A single star looks down through the long ethereal aisles, and from the eye of heaven comes a smile of ineffable peace. . . .

I turn towards the town again, and my heart is full of many memories. The evening and the night are the times of memory, of reflection, of the recalling of forgotten scenes. The wind is in the trees again, stronger and wilder, blowing from the west. Through the boughs it

comes with a sound as of the rushing of the sea. The sea—ah ! I can hear the sound of the sea here upon the road in imagination. I think that I see another night—a cloudy night, unusually calm, a night of the long ago, when I first beheld the glinting of the moonlight upon a lonely and shadowy sea. The ocean was as calm as a mountain-locked lake on a windless summer evening. It lay all in shadow, scarcely a gleam upon its surface save, a mile or two away, this silver streak of light glittering upon the impassive water.

I wonder what affected me so strangely then, and ever afterwards when I have seen the moonlight gleam upon water or heard the sound of the sea. Perhaps it was the thought that so often comes when one is face to face with Nature in her wildernesses ; the thought that here was something, an incident so simple and yet so beautiful that had been occurring and recurring all through the long centuries, and I had never seen it before.

But this sight of the moonlight on the sea had been there all the time ; it would be there still when I was far away again. And to have seen it only once gave me something of itself.

A little of its own still, wondrous beauty came into my heart as I looked wondering at its mystery and at the unutterable thoughts that struggled for expression. Long have I thought of it since ; often shall I think of it again.

And now with the sound of the wind between the trees it comes back, and my heart is full of the murmur of moonlit waters. It is good to think that nothing can take away joy that has once been felt, beauty that has once been seen. Whatever else the world and time —those twin thieves of human happiness— may steal from me, they can never draw back that moment when I first saw the moonlight shining on the waters of a night-veiled sea.

The wind still comes through the shadowy trees, rising and falling like the beating of invisible waves and the spirit of the sea is still in my heart. Again, it is a sea of utmost peace, but not the peace of the moonlight and the stars. A calm level sea, broken by zephyr-like windlets into a myriad wrinkled ripples. The glow of a tender sunset over the far horizon. Red and gold lying warmly in the loving sky. And on the waters pearl and opal and azure and fair white foam at the edge of the yellow

sands. The cool pulsing of the water laps against my naked feet ; and the breath of the sunset-sea kindles the Nature-love in my soul. Behind the sandy coast, abruptly above green woodlands, tower craggy mountain rocks and jagged pinnacles cutting into the calm overhead blue. Upon the summit of the stern crags there lingers a rosy blush. The mountains still look into the face of the sun that is now hidden from the silver ripples of the sea, and their harsh, hard brows are softened with the light of the sun's ruddy smile. Ever below is the restless, changeful sea, flitting with marvellous ever-changing colours—silver and gold and pearl and all the hues of fabled gems.

But richer than all gems, fairer than the brightest gold, is the spirit of the waters of the sunset. It is " the holy time " of evening.

> . . . quiet as a nun
> Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun
> Is sinking down in its tranquillity.
> The gentleness of heaven is on the sea.
> Listen ! the mighty being is awake,
> And doth with his eternal motion make
> A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

Everlastingly ! I would that the tranquillity of the sea in this evening of my memory should so remain for ever in my heart.

In body I am still wandering upon the night-shadowed roadway, but I feel my heart is wandering upon the highway of dim memories. On that road there is sunshine and shadow alternately. One step in the sunlight, the next in the mistiness of despair and regret. But all around the murmur of forgotten seas, the glory of unremembered days, the vision of the eternal stars. . . .

I see the stars of a drowsy summer night, when the world is lost in the deepness of dreams. My resting-place is a tent beneath the trees that fringe one of the pastures of a placid valley. The breathless summer night enwraps all in the enchanting sweetness of its dreams. I take my bed to the wide door of the tent, and lie down with my face upturned to the star-maze. The foliage of an overhanging tree throws an interlacing canopy over my couch, but through the intricate leaves one clear star burns and gazes down into my eyes. I look through the golden gleam into the uttermost realms of space. I am no longer of the earth. My soul goes straight up to the star, and from that heavenly altitude I look over all the world. I see the eternal seas and the moonlight upon

their waters ; the crooning rivers, and the grey, silent roads leading away through the darkness to the world's end ; and over the farthest distances of the sea to——

Ah ! A long, deep silence, and it is morning, and the sunlight is flooding the heavy-dewed fields with a sea of gold.

And that, too, is another scene upon the road of memory.

As for me, I am at the town again, and my dreams and memories are over. But since I was here the restless people have left the streets to the empty, cold glare of the arc-lamps and the solitary sound of my footsteps upon the pavement. They have all gone—gone inside the houses. And their dreams are just beginning. Well, may they be as pleasant as mine have been.

A September Day

IX

SEPTEMBER is the last month of summer, and at the same time the first of autumn, and there comes within its borders a day which brings a sudden realisation that the summer is nearly ended. It is not a very definite or sharply-drawn realisation, perhaps more it is of a suggestion, for the sun is yet warm with the breath of summer-time, and the sky still spread with a cloudless blue. But when you look up to the hills there is not the same glowing freshness upon their sides, and where the sunlight beats upon them they are turning slowly to the dry brown of the withered bracken and rushes. There is a touch of yellow creeping into the green of the trees' massed foliage, and the soft rustle of fallen leaves upon the shaded roadway—only a few of them yet, but they are the fore-runners of all the others.

Before this time of the changing of the seasons there is generally a week of sunny,

golden days, that are more dear to the heart of the lover of Nature in their warmth and sunlit glories than are perhaps any other days of the summer, because it is known they are the last. There is no looking forward in September. If it is rainy one cannot say, "There are the June roses to come yet," or anticipate July, with her waving meadows and the scent of the newly-cut hay afterwards, and the wealth of flowers and grasses in the fields and hedgerows. August, too, is past, with the coming of the rich glory of purple heather bloom in the latter days, and September, the last of the sunny months, is here and gone, almost before you know it.

To me, therefore, the summer of September is the sweetest of all, because it is the ending before the shadow of the winter is thrown between the warm sun and the earth, and through the cold and sunless days I shall remember the summer as I last saw it in September.

The beauty of September is like the beauty of the sunset; it is beautiful because it is such a fleeting thing, with all the glory of the day behind it and all the concentrated loveliness of the bygone hours wrapped up in the space of a

few last glowing moments, before the darkness comes. And it is the moment before the dark that one thinks of through the night, for in it lies the promise of the new dawning; so it is that the sunny days of September are the memory through the winter, and in their remembrance is the first stirring of the future spring-time.

Pleasant are the lanes in September when the last of the harebells are lingering upon the banks, peeping out between the grass blades, in little points of soft colour, like atoms of pale-blue light fallen from the dome of the sun-washed sky. There is the meadow-sweet, too, with its rich scent. In the meadow-sweet, I think, is contained the whole fragrance of summer; its tiny creamy flowers seem to breathe out something of the very life which lives in the open air, taking something from the warmth of the sun and the sweetness of the earth, and returning them mingled with its own beauty which has sprung out of these things.

If you take it home it retains its fragrance for a long time. I have now a little spray of it, which has lain between the closed pages of a

book for two long years since it was gathered from the side of the lane of which I am writing; and though the little flower is dead and withered long ago, there still clings to it a faint suggestion of its sweet, delicate aroma.

What memories these dead flowers between the printed pages bring back again of the summers that are past! The meadow-sweet that grew in the lane, where the long grass springing from the edge of the white roadway overtopped the fence with its luxuriant growth, the ivy that crept over the mossy wall that was always green, even when the fields were lying cold and dead under grey skies; the rose that once blossomed in the old garden.

What happiness to go back to the old places again when the summer returns, and walk through the same lane and back into the pleasant garden! And yet there is a little sadness about it, too, for they are not quite the same as the years pass away, these familiar haunts of mine. There is something that is missing, something that has gone from where it was before.

These poor dead flowers of mine—they can never be replaced where they once grew; in

the thoughts of those other days, there is something that does not come back to me with the summer. But the memories are there still though the flowers are withered, and the memories of the days when they were gathered are everlasting.

It is a pity, I think, that it is found necessary to cut away from the hedgerows and the banks of the lanes every back-end the rich profusion of the overhanging grasses and flowers. It is invariably done as the end of August or September comes round, and the result is that much of the beauty of the lanes is prematurely destroyed, as if the winter's approach would not do it soon enough! Often in a single night an unexpected frost will strip the trees of many leaves and shrivel to blackness the flowers that remain in the garden and out in the fields.

A trim grass bank or a closely-clipped hedge may look well enough in front of a town house, but in a country lane they are out of place, and merely spoil the prospect. The very tangled disorder of the hedgerows is beautiful because it is natural, and it seems entirely wrong that the knife should be allowed to work such havoc amongst the last flowers of the summer. Why

not wait a little longer, until Nature herself begins to destroy the overhanging leaves and grass by the process of the decay that winter brings, and then, if need be, begin the trimming of the hedges and the clearing of the grass ?

In this lane the work is yet only half-done, and one side is thickly overgrown, while on the other bank the bill-hook and the sickle have been in operation, leaving only the still fresh green of the under-grass. Here and there, however, the harebells are still to be seen underneath the hawthorn bushes, whose tough and prickly branches have withstood the attack of the knife, and in the dense thickets at the foot of the hedge are the remains of the nests where the birds rested in the spring, but now forsaken and hidden no longer by the long grass.

From the lane here there are glimpses now and again between the hedges and the masses of the higher trees, which in places tunnel in the roadway with the shadow of their overhanging boughs ; of the distant mountains, coloured a deep blue against the paler azure of the morning sky. In between, the undulating moorland

which connects the meadowland in the valley with the far-off mountains is already beginning to take on the autumn tints. On the other side of the lane there are meadows, mown some time ago, and now covered with vividly bright green, where the second crop of grass has come up since the hay was gathered in. If you were to look at the meadows alone and forget the time of the year, you might almost think it was spring again.

The country people call this second grass "fog," and sometimes you will see, when a farm is changing hands, on a bill on the barn doors announcing the sale of the stock, some such item as "Twenty-two acres of thick, unbroken fog," which at first sight is a little puzzling to the town-dweller, whose "fog" is something very different.

Beyond the meadows rises another line of hills, where you can distinguish the soft, glowing purple of the heather. The wet summer promised ill for the coming of the mountain-flower, but still it is there in considerable profusion. In it the bees will be working hard, for it is a favourite flower of theirs, and they are making up for the lost time and the enforced

idleness that the rainy days have brought. There are the wild bees, fat and bulky, who buzz about heavily; some have a broad band of yellow across the back, and others have a dull, red patch upon their brown coats. There is the hive bee, too, not as stout as his wild brother, and he appears more alert and business-like, and has not so gay a costume. He works a while at the purple petals and then is away with swift flight; a mere black dot against the sky.

Very, very industrious are the hive bees, and very, very angry they can get if you interfere at all with them in their work. You may stand and watch them at a respectful distance, but if you by chance get in the direct line between the fields and the doorway of the hive, you will soon have a whole tribe of them buzzing threateningly around, and if you are wise, you take the warning. Poor little busy workers; who can blame them when they come home laden to the uttermost extent of their power and then find their way blocked by a great lazy human lout, who is idly dreaming instead of working? Sometimes the bees are so heavily laden that they quite miss the alight-

ing board and fall down among the grass roots at the front of the hive. There they have to rest awhile, until at last they rise again and swiftly take inside their sweet spoils. So busily do the hive bees work, on a favourable day, that sometimes they are going in and out of the little doorway at the rate of at least a hundred every minute.

Down by the river on a sunny September day the sunlight is playing in the mazes of an eternal dance upon the ripples. It burns down upon the grassy banks with a whitish glare, and shines upward through the depths of the water, cool and soft looking as the water itself. There is light of every colour and hue near the riverside. Dancing golden light upon the running water, and the steady liquid green light from the reflection of the sunny banks rising upwards through the network of shimmering ripples. In the shade under the trees it seems comparatively dark, for the strongest beams of the sun seem unable to penetrate the dense foliage of the trees whose shadows lie upon the banks and the water.

But even here there is still light—even in the shadow. The up-turned surface of the waters

catches the gleam of the sun's rays, weaves it into its own rippling movement, and then throws the mingling of light and liquid motion in a fairy dance, glancing upward into the leaves. So the leaves are set dancing by the water and the sunlight, or seem to be, for really they are themselves quite still, for there is not a breath of wind. All through the day this mystic, entrancing dance goes on, only ceasing for a moment when the shadow of a cloud passes over the sun, and then I am sorry, for I know it is moving still behind the shadow, only I cannot see it.

Now and again there comes from the river the sound of a splash, where the fish are jumping from the water. Sometimes you will see them—the sudden eruption of light from the shadow, where the still water is thrown upwards into a thousand glittering drops, intensely white in the glare of the sun, a momentary flash of gleaming scales, and then the ripple on the water, and the slow subsidence into stillness again. A little like life, is it not—the sudden leap from the still, silent unknown into the light and vision of the world, and back to the unknown again; the upward

course, the turning-point, and the inevitable swift descent! And it seems almost as if it were largely a matter of chance whether the leap is made into the brightness of the sunlight or into the darkness of the shadow. But the end is the same, the return certain.

And so this September day goes on happy and sunny, till the evening comes with lengthening shadows, and the sweetness of silence and solitude. When the sun goes the darkness comes swiftly, and there is an autumn chill in the night air. The sunsets are often stormy-looking, and the twilight departs soon, because of the great packs of dark clouds that drift over the hills from the westward, and throw a heavy curtain in front of the last glow of the light. Very cold and blue the hills look under the gloomy canopy, but often enough the passing of the night will clear away the clouds, and the morning will dawn as brightly as ever. In the east, too, it is frequently quite clear, though the western sky is overhung and threatening.

The moon, golden like the harvest, rises slowly out of the sea of shadows which linger over the low-lying land, where the night mists, weird and damp and cheerless, are rising.

Overhead the sky takes on a darkening blue, liquid and full of the mystery of unknown deeps, and the stars peep out with winking eyes through the immeasurable distance.

A Riverside Reverie

X

UNDER the grey arches of the old stone bridge the river flows in placid peacefulness, the waters moving so slowly that, save for the low crooning voice which comes up to me in a soft melodious murmur, they would hardly seem to be moving at all. I like to stand upon the centre of the bridge where the road converges upward to the highest point of the arch, and look down into the cool depths of the water. The placidity and restfulness of the river seem to impart something of their dreamful influences to my own heart and mind, rubbing off the corners of the harsher feelings, as the waters have worn smooth the pebbles which I can see lying deep down upon the river's bed, where the shadow of the bridge falls darkly upon it.

The shadow gradually lightens as the eye travels up the river, until the surface of the water is no longer clear and transparent, but

becomes a mirror, wherein the blue and gold of the sky, and the green reflections of the grasses and reeds, which rise out of the margin, mingle in soft liquid beauty with the flowing of the water; higher up still at the bend, where the course of the stream is more shallow and less sheltered by the banks, the surface is blown by the wind and disturbed by the stony bottom into a thousand interwoven ripples, and upon these the sun touches countless little gleams of dancing, golden light.

Upon one bank is a small plantation of trees, whose lower branches bend over the brim and sometimes stoop to kiss the face of the waters which under their shadow moves slowly, and almost silently, in and out of deep, green pools, which are overhung with an air of calm, sweet mystery, in contrast to the laughing, sunlit, joyous ripples on the other side. The silvery songs of many birds sound from the wood; below in the stream the trout poise waveringly in the water, and then suddenly disturbed by my footsteps on the bridge dart swiftly up the stream to the shallows; in the air the swallows hover and wheel, and weave an incessant, unseen web between bank and bank; a peewit

comes circling across the meadows, uttering her wailing cry ; and a lark high in the azure sky rains down a volume of full-throated melody.

As in the air and the waters, the fields, too, are moving with life. Scores of merry little brown rabbits are dotted here and there among the green, and they will rush away back to their refuge in the wood in a tremendous hurry if you raise your voice high enough for them to hear. The cows move leisurely about the pastures, or else are lying lazily in the long fresh grass, supremely content seemingly, under the warm light and life of the sun. Over all the scene, in the air, in the glorious wealth of green upon the grass and in the trees, in the rippling of the water, in the glance of the sunlight through the branches, in the light and shadow of the river's banks, in the distant hills, there is the quiver of an untold life, a feeling of wondrous peace and calm and restfulness, yet quite indefinable, and beyond the grasp of the mind—a golden haze of beautiful thoughts, as it were.

I can never explain to myself what is the great beauty that lies away out in the heart of

Nature. It is not the mere physical beauty of the fields and the streams of the woods and the hills. It is that to some extent, of course ; but it is more—far more. The sound of a murmuring stream, the play of the sunlight amongst the trees, the glow of colour in a country lane, the wild freedom of the open hills, and the thoughts it all brings—that is when one feels the intense delight of Nature and of life. Yet if you try to analyse the thoughts that hover around the mind in such moments, you can no more bring them within the defined limits of your understanding than you can catch the swallow in its flight or stay the swift course of the trout in the stream.

But at least you can share for a while in the joy of the living things of the air, of the meadows, and of the water. What an unclouded joy, what a fulness of life their existence holds ! For to them life contains nought but the present. To them there is no past, with its crowd of sorrowful remembrances ; no future which casts before its coming the shadow of many doubtings. Only the day, only the hour, only the moment is all that life holds for these creatures of the open air—and what

more? A lifelong happiness, for to them the days and the hours never move.

The present is all to them, and in it alone they live, never wondering what may come, never pondering upon what may have gone. The dawn breaks, but to them it does not mean that they are entering upon another day of life—it is the dawn, and nothing more. The shadows glide imperceptibly, but slowly and surely, from the westward to the eastward as the day advances, but there is nothing of the awful, and sometimes almost overpowering, significance of passing time to them.

And the twilight comes, but it does not mean that another day has passed out of their lives—only that it is evening—for the days for them never pass. Night and day, morning, noon and eve are all in the present to them, no idea of time's inevitable, unceasing travel ever comes to cast the shadow of dark thoughts upon their happy lives. Never to them comes the eternal question of the future which weighs heavy upon the minds of the human race.

Even under the fierce storm which may come to-morrow, bird and beast will live unmoved, and through the long, cold, dead

winter, when the wind will sweep bitterly through the naked branches, when the fields, now so full of the warmth and brightness and colour and springing life of the early summer, will be under weeping skies, dull and grey, they will still meet the coming days, trustfully and unfearfully, unwondering and uncomplaining, taking each moment as it comes, until the sunny summer skies return.

It is not for me to live the life of unclouded joy and happiness, unbroken by cares of the past or doubts of the future, of these creatures of the woodland and hill, but I can, at least, live with them for a moment in their unceasing delight of the present, as I stand on the bridge and look out upon the water, the meadows and the sky.

Sometimes I have walked along the narrow lane which passes along the bank of the river —a winding lane with high banks and hedges, bespangled with the last of the primroses and the violets, with here and there the little blue veronica peeping through the green grass and bunches of the tiny delicate forget-me-not flower. For a while the river is left, but soon the path leads again on to the bank to the

point where the waters of the brook join with those of the larger stream. The brook rises in the green hill which lies behind me, and the river's source is to be found away on the slopes of the mountains, whose distant blue summits I can see over beyond the woodlands which lie in between.

It is pleasant to think that something of the beauties of both hill and mountain mingles in the meeting of the waters. The brook comes merrily chattering and hurrying along, laughing aloud with the very joy of the life which glows upon the green hillside yonder; the river reflects in its more placid course something of the majesty and mystery which encircle the blue mountain tops far away up the valley. Or sometimes I have gone still higher up the river to where the fringe of the great wood meets the water. The wood comes steeply down from a high and rocky crag with a fine bold sweep, which is cut off abruptly at the river's edge.

Under the shadow of the trees there seems from the pathway to be a haze of soft limpid blue spreading away through the shady vistas between the innumerable trunks as far as the

eye can see. These are the wild hyacinths, the "blue-bells," growing in thousands and thousands, the beauty of their single flowers lost in their sheer numbers, but gaining a new loveliness in the wide-reaching mass of glowing colour which flows through the maze of trees and among the green and brown tones of the undergrowth, seeming to light up the wood with the radiance of their myriad petals.

And so as I sit near the place where wood and river meet, amongst the springing grass, with the whisper of a thousand leaves above me and the murmured song of the water below, the moments pause for me in their flight, and I am lifted out of the consciousness of passing time. I feel the enthralling fascination of all this wide-spreading beauty, which takes away all thoughts of the fleeting hours.

The lark that was singing above me when I stood upon the bridge has descended to earth again; the peewit's cry is no longer heard; the swallows are no more seen; but the gentle, crooning melody of the river is ever with me. In the morning when I pass over the bridge it is there singing its endless song, and again under the noonday sun, and in the calm,

still light of evening, and yet again when the pale promise of the moon begins to glow over the eastern hill; and when I look down over the bridge I can see the stars trembling in the unshapen shadows which hide between the arches and the water.

Coming down the long road to the bridge in the night I hear it, first no more than a distant, low, sweet murmur, but slowly rising to the fulness of its enchanting night song, and when I hear that voice of the flowing stream I sometimes feel as if I can never leave it, that I must stay with the spirit of the river, sleep upon the bosom of its cold waters, and drift for ever on the endless stream, down between the mysterious banks, into the unknown shadowy distance. Then, maybe, I could more clearly learn the meaning of these thoughts that the river brings, and drink more deeply of its mysterious beauty; then I might partake more fully of the calmness of spirit that the river possesses; then I might see more truly what the great life of the world means. But now I can only return again and again along the road to the bridge, and for that, at least, I am thankful. For as long as I come, so long will

the river come too, and when I come no more, the river will still come and give of its boundless peacefulness, echoing the same thoughts up to those who linger upon the bridge as it has done to me.

Fireside Memories

XI

I SIT alone in the flickering glow of the fire-light as the grey autumn afternoon is fading into the dusk of the hastening evening. Outside the wind is blowing fiercely, whirling the ragged clouds across the leaden sky, and spattering the heavy rain in an incessant tattoo against the window-pane. All is grey and damp and cheerless out of doors, and only the consolation of the leaping flame upon the hearth and a friendly pipe in the falling twilight, amid the thoughts that linger dreamily around the mind, is left to me. The summer is gone, the world is sleeping once again—how soon! It seems only yesterday that I was watching for its coming, looking for the first flowers in the hedgerows, and hearing the love-songs of the nesting birds.

I am thinking of the winding lane, with its fresh green banks, and the glowing hues of the primroses and the violets; of the blooming of

the wild roses, whose petals I see gleaming again upon the thorny, tangled bushes; the scent of the meadow-sweet in the broad pastures comes faintly back to me, but how deeply buried in the shadows of the past they all seem! Still I remember it all, and so I will look again upon the scenes of summer England, even though the autumn blast howl above me and the wild rain beat coldly on the silent earth. Once more I will wander through familiar pathways in the sweetness of the bygone summer, and call back again the joy of the vanished sunlight through the shadow of the intervening days, until the wandering fancy shall seem to be only the living present, shattering by its very beauty the darkness of the winter's foreboding.

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The first scene that I behold through the eyes of the mind is of a mountain pass, rugged and majestic. I am in North Wales, and the rocky road upon which I am walking winds upward to the summit between great steep screes of loose stone and towering craggy heights, whose shadows fall far down the valley behind me. Onward and upward the road

goes, until at last it is level with the highest rocks ; only the rough mountain grass blowing in the fresh wind is marked against the sky on the one hand, and on the other a yawning descent to the bottom of a deep gorge, where a little stream tinkles merrily.

Among the echoing crags the notes of a coach-horn ring out clearly, and then die away tremulously into the utter silence and solitude of the mountain tops. Again the road descends, and at a sudden turn—behold a green and wooded valley, with far-spreading meadows lying in the golden sunlight of the new-born summer, and beyond the youthful pastures, the grey and wrinkled visage of the old, old sea, stretching far away between the mountain sides to the dim horizon-haze.

Yonder, under the steepest slope of the great mountains, are the peaceful house-tops of a small village, nestling in the dark folds of the woodlands that are thickly strewn between the bareness of the rocky hillsides and the sheltered greenness of the broad meadows. Behind the village is a fairy glen embowered in the branches of a thousand trees, and mingling with the low rustling of the leaves the voice of a mountain

stream, tumbling over innumerable tiny waterfalls, makes merry music the day through.

* * * * *

Ah, the waterfalls! I remember them again in another land. On the dusky brink of a summer night I am standing on the height of one of the precipitous scars overlooking the river in Swaledale. I can hear the dull roaring of the foss a hundred feet below coming up endlessly out of the depths. In the morning I sat for hours—or so it seemed—just at the foot of the fall, and watched the rushing, boiling water hurling itself with an unstayable force over the edge of the rock into the dark, deep pool below. What a glorious display of happy living colour was there!

The shadow of a ledge of rock over which the water tumbled lay upon the river below; the falling stream gleamed vivid, and the sunlight playing upon the rising spray lighted it up with rainbow hues. The steep banks were of glowing green, and looking down the valley the grey limestone scars overhung the river with their rocky heights. In between the water glistened and sparkled, reflecting the clouds that passed across the sky, and upon

the banks in soft and radiant hues gleamed the myriad petals of the pink and white wild roses, resting in a bosom of emerald green.

Now the colour and the sunlight have fled before the shadows of the coming night. Only in the western sky does the faintest tinge of crimson linger, and the light is thrown softly on the face of the scar which rises out of the dim, dark depths of the ravine. Below and above are the shadows, save where the shining stars glisten in the darkening heavens, and where the face of the river reflects the last momentary gleam of the uncertain light. The soft warmth of the summer night envelops all in a strange sweet mystery, that is echoed in the far-off crooning of the ever-flowing river. Above, the undulating moorland throws sweeping curves against the stars, and in the deepest shadow the light of a distant farm trembles under the darkness of the brooding hills.

* * * * *

On a sunny afternoon in August I see the placid, peaceful waters of Bassenthwaite Lake, in Cumberland, lying under an arching sky of purest white and azure. We are driving along the road by the western shore, and the horses'

hoofs clatter cheerfully upon the dusty white road. Close at hand, rising sheer from the roadway, are craggy cliffs, with tufts of purple heather fringing the skyward edge, and in the crevices are the bright green streaks of the hartstongue fern. On the other side, between the sturdy trunks of trees, still heavy and rich with the summer foliage, lie the waters of the lake, and the sound of the ripples of the tiny waves washing against the reed-fringed banks comes up softly as in a dream to my ears.

At every turn of the road another reach of the mountain-locked waters opens out, until the farmost end is seen crowned by a vision of distant hills, clothed in the blue haze of a summer afternoon. Across the lake uprises the towering outline of Skiddaw out of the masses of dark green woodland, its bare brown sides leaping up over rock and heather to the cloudland summit, that is reflected in the clearness of the water below. An hour or two is gone, and the day begins to droop towards its close. The haze in the valley clears, and rises into the still sky, the sun dips to the horizon in a crimson glow, and the jagged line of mountain peaks cuts sharply into the clearness of the

heavens. Out of the mysterious sky a wreath of mist lights upon the brow of the mighty, majestic Skiddaw, and over the long surface of the lake the evening shadows creep silently on.

* * * * *

I am in Sherwood Forest upon the velvet greensward dappled with the shade of the leaves and the sunlight which shines even through the clustering shadow of a thousand trees. On every hand a vision of glowing green, the soft whisperings of myriad leaves, the silvery songs of hidden birds. Legends of the olden days hover beneath the sheltering branches, and it is strange to think of the summer youthfulness of the forest and the oldness of the world. For miles and miles it seems the trees extend over the forest sward.

A road leads through a winding avenue of stately oaks, and from it shady green lanes with delightful woodland vistas dart away into the cool depths of the forest, where underneath the overhanging boughs the graceful deer glance up with timid surprise at the passer-by. Everywhere are gigantic trees whose branches, though gnarled and twisted into a variety of fantastic shapes by the passage of the cen-

turies, bear yet as great a wealth of green and glorious foliage as in those other days when the virgin soil of the forest was yet untrodden and untracked by human pathways.

Here and there among the interlacing boughs I see trees whose life has at last been beaten out of them by the storms of time. There they stand, with their gaunt blackened trunks and broken dead branches outlined against the sky, silently telling that to all things—even to the hills and the woods and the streams—there shall some day be an end. But around them climb the springing, living leaves of the forest, striving to hide the death that lingers there, and speaking only of the youthfulness that is still in the life of the world. After all, the forest does not speak of death but of life. Though the old oak is dead, the leaves of others still rustle in the everlasting wind, the deer still bound away through the bracken down the woodland glades at the sound of my footstep, and the songs of the birds yet sound through the aisles of the woods as they did in the long-past days when the world was young.

* * * * *

Somehow or other I am back again in Swale-

dale, leaving the fair valley by a mountain road, in the glad light of early morning.

As I pass along the dale through the meadows glistening with the night dews, yet unmelted by the warmth of the sun's rays, the first twining wisps of smoke curl into the clear air from the house-tops of the villages, and out of the grey, old houses come the country people, setting out along the quiet roads for the toil of the day. How I envy them, those quiet, simple folk, for I know they will work all day in the fields under the brown hillsides, out in the glory of the sunlight, while I am going away over the mountains from the peacefulness of Nature to the furious rush and hurry of the town's life. In the meadows the shadows of the trees still stretch lengthily over the grass, and upon the mountains the last lingering mists of the night melt away as the warmth grows in the air.

The moor-birds fly upon strong and swift wings over the billowy heather, and call sharply and shrilly to each other through the crisp clearness of the mountain atmosphere. Soon I reach the other side of the hill, and look down upon a new valley, with a river of shimmering

silver flowing in the midst of new-mown meadows. On the far border of the vale rise again the brown, rolling fells, backed by higher and more distant hills, and far away in the golden haze of the morning a mountain with a flattened summit, which I know is Ingleborough.

* * * * *

I see Ingleborough again, this time from my own Hodder Valley, less familiar to most people than many a better-known corner of England, but dearer than them all to me. I see it in the calm stillness of a Sunday morning, when the chiming of the church bells steals distantly over the silent fields. I wander again into the whispering woods, where the trees sway softly in the breeze, and in early June the shaded earth is covered with the beautiful radiance of the wild hyacinths. I stand once more on the old bridge, and listen to the happy ripple of the river and see the dance of the sunlight upon the sparkling water. Again I look up to the awakening hills, born again into the glad light of another day, with the rosy tints of the morning still reposing upon their calm brow.

I am climbing the stony roadway which goes up to the breezy moorlands, in the grey-

ness before the rising of the sun. The valley lies below, still full of the night's cold, dark mystery, but a turn of the road brings the broad, bold sweep of the hillsides to my vision, and over the farthermost edge the first warm hues of the day are burning on the brim of the horizon. I see, too, the solemn beauty of the sinking sun when the sky is flaming in crimson and orange, and the purple shadows steal darkly up the hillsides, while the pale glimmer of the moon hangs in the still azure of the fading east. Another day nearly over; another summer almost past. So many days have stolen over this dear valley—vanished and departed as silently and swiftly as the mists of the morning.

The world seems so old when I think of all those years that have gone—and yet to-day there is still the same happiness over and surrounding all things. That is the best of it all—to know that whatever comes or goes, these hills and woods, the dwelling-places of Nature's calm, sweet spirit, remain evermore.

* * * * *

Once more I see Ingleborough's summit as I stand upon the hill which rises above the busy town. Below me are the miles and miles of

gloomy streets, the thousand ugly, blackened chimneys, and the grey, drab smoke obscuring the peaceful sky. There comes up the dull roar of the factories and the sound of the thronged streets in a mighty hum of toiling industry. But away in the sunlit distance lies Ingleborough, and how many miles of happy, beautiful country in between?

And yet—I turn again to the town, and think of the people toiling amid the smoke and the gloom—how many are there who never care to come to the mountains and the valleys? Is it not all wrong, this life of the shuttered-in towns and cities, with their dreary round of grey, colourless days, strangling the hopes and aspirations of so many lives by their very dreariness alone—nay, is it life at all?

I wonder if the people will always shut themselves away from Nature, covering the green earth with their dull, hard pavements, shutting out the glory of the sunlight with the ugly smoke-clouds and the gloomy buildings, hiding with an artificial existence the glowing, beautiful reality of Nature's life.

* * * * *

Ah, I am back again in the firelit room, with

the gloom of the swiftly-fallen night outside. Still the rain beats loudly at the window, and the wind moans in a mournful cadence. I wonder what they are like to-night, those mountains and valleys, the rivers and woods, the meadows and the waterfalls, that I saw under the glowing skies of summer. If I could only return just now, and see them again as I did on those days of the vanished past—But no! I will not wonder, or wish either, for under the mournful autumn night they could not be the same.

But still I can remember them, if only as the happy visions of a beautiful dream, and that alone I will do.

For to wonder and to wish are only vain, but remembrance is everlasting.

The Mystery of Water

XII

WALKING along the moorland roadway in the last glimmering of the silent twilight, when the golden eyes of the stars were just beginning to peer out from between the drifting folds of the clouds, and the closing grey gleam of the nigh-dead daylight hovered above the deepening shadows which shrouded the western hills, my eye suddenly caught a swift gleam of twinkling star-light flashed from the still face of a pool upon the rough and stony roadway, left by the rains of the morning. I had been walking in a dream, as is my wont. I had thought I was still a mile away down the road, where it wound amid the May meadows, peaceful in the afterglow of the sunset.

The last time I remembered anything definitely I had seen the fresh green of the spring-time foliage upon the branches that drooped over the climbing road as it wound upwards to the hilltop and the rosy sky beyond. The

gorse was flaming with a yellow, beautiful fire upon the banks of sparkling emerald, and lower down, near the ditch, the star-like primroses shone in the rich young grass, and the softly-gleaming eyes of the violets peeped out from amid the undergrowth of the hedgerows. And all around and above in the sweet fresh breezes of the shadowy eventide flitted to and fro happy birds, calling and re-calling to each other across the fields on whose farthest side the shadows darkened under the dense woodlands as the night stole into the sky upon silent wings.

On many a leafy bough the thrushes made the twilight thrill with their wondrous melodies of love, and life reawakened as the tender thoughts that the spring had brought had made the skies smile again and the earth re-echo their laughter ; higher up the road the strange, weird cry of the lapwings, hovering and wheeling like restless bird spirits, rang out with something of a haunting sadness in their wailing notes, even amid the happiness of spring ; and as I had approached the place where the meadows end and the moorland begins I heard across the waste of heath and reeds the whist-

ling call of the lone curlew, tremulous, but full of liquid, rolling music that had the spirit of the free moorland in its drawn-out shrill.

And then came the silence of the night-tide, and I seemed alone on the moor. Then I had fallen a-thinking and a-dreaming as my feet instinctively followed the well-known way of the road. Thinking—of what? Maybe that the spring had come again with its sunlight, and rustling leaves, and waving grass, and sweet, slender flowers, and the call of the birds —the birds that had made all the long day happy with their melodious music, that was now sinking with the sunset to the silence of the night-tide; that the earth was young again and all things young, too, even the care-worn heart, because that also must grow young again for the love of the endlessly repeated story of the springtime of the world.

And then this single gleam from the still pool upon the silent roadway shining in my eyes for a swift moment—the golden glance of a star reflected from the water that had fallen from the heaven-land. And then the faint echoes of the music of a forgotten song came to make a lonely wanderer on the road no longer

lonely, but to sing of the mystery and wonder of the world.

> A star hath fallen on the spot
> Where thou art singing;
> Thy bracelets' ringing
> Keeps all the birds awake . . .
>
> Come now and sing a song for me;
> Thy voice I love it, too;
> Yea, like the river's rippling sound
> As through the maize it flows,
> Or like the poplar's whispering
> That by the threshold grows.

A "song of the young, young maid," sung by the peasant folk of Roumania. A song, like all their songs, full of the beauty and glory and love of the great free world. I wonder if those people in that far, far land ever dreamt that the music of their songs should find an echo in the hearts of another people and awaken the realisation of the mother-love of Nature, that knows no race or caste or creed, but is universal and everlasting, deep down in the hearts of her children.

"Come now and sing a song for me." Aye! The world is full of sweet, sweet songs if we would only listen. Some of us have wandered so far from Nature nowadays—more's the pity.

But they are still there, the songs of the world —there in "the river's rippling sound," in "the poplar's whispering," in the winds of the wide, free moorlands, in the sweet seclusion of the sheltered meadows, in the greenwood where the blue-bells grow beneath the shade of the interlacing boughs. You never hear them, my friends of the city streets, or only faintly and afar off. Think of the song of the spring—the song of eternal youth—the song of immortality!

Have you ever heard that, my friends? Not many of you, I fancy, or the world would be far different than it is. For Heaven's sake, look up to the blue sky sometimes, you poor blind creatures with bent brows and toil-wearied faces, and stop your endless grubbing in the dust. It is not worth it if the dust were made of gold; for gold is not life.

What is there in this mystery of the starshine in the pool upon the lonely moor? It is the mystery of water, of all the elements in Nature the most mysterious. Think of it—the tiny pool that joins the starland to the earth by an invisible pathway—the water which carries down the glory of the lights of the

heavenland to the cold ground under the windy night-sky—the little wind-rippled pool, scarcely an inch in depth, that reflects the intense, immeasurable space of a universe of worlds. The rain fell in the morning, and left this little pool upon the road. To-morrow, maybe, it will be gone—vanished with the rays of the sun beating upon the road.

So evanescent it is, so fleeting ; and yet to-night as I look into its rippled face I see the image of the eternal stars. Hollow, depthless space brought into the compass of a few drops of water that the two hands could almost hold. Eternity gathered into a fleeting momentary light-gleam from a moorland pool. Is it not wonderful ? And how is it that we do not think of these things oftener ? Are they not better than dust ? Are they not more wonderful than gold ?

There is an old well on the height of the moor, with bright green moss growing over the rugged stone that bears a time-worn date of ninety years ago. It is a long climb from the valley, and the road is often hot and dusty even in the spring twilight. So that it is a welcome moment to stay by the well, where the silver

tinkle of the running water sounds thin and tremulous under the brooding shadows of the hills. The streamlet comes twining and gliding through the grasses and reeds on the hillside, and fills the old well with its pure cold water; then it overflows at the lower end, and goes wandering away down the mountain to the misty vale below.

Here, sometimes, in the stillness of the night I stoop to the well's clear water and drink. There is the cold kiss of the ripple, the low laughter of the water, and far, far away, down, down in the immeasurable depths, the calm smile of the stars. If only I could tell of the mystery that there is in that calm, sweet smile! It is as if I were seeing strange things, thinking unimagined thoughts, stirred by an unknown influence. I am looking into the eyes of All-Wisdom. I see strange things, and dream strange, beautiful, wonderful dreams—and yet they are not strange. The murmurous sounds of the night float about me, the call of some lone bird echoes faintly across the wide moor, the wind wheels its whispering way over the hills, and the ripple of the water falls and rises and falls in silvery cadences—and all

the while those sweet, calm eyes draw mine to their golden gaze through eternal space.

> Here eyes do regard you,
> In Eternity's stillness.

The veil is lifted as I look into the deep distance through the waters of the well to the stars. These other things don't matter—nothing matters—but the Eternity of the stars. I look up to them, but they are not the same far above in the heavens. They are too far away for me to reach even with my sight. But mingled with the mystery of the water—the water that I may touch with my life, and let the cool ripple slip through my fingers—they are mine, though they are Eternal. They come from the abyss of the sky to gaze into the eyes of men.

From the well upon the moor the mountain streamlet wanders down its devious pathway through ravine and meadow, until it comes to the broad river that waters the fair vale below. And in the river, too, is much mystery. All the glory of the happy skies it carries on its waters, and it sings them to the wanderer on its brim. Sunlight and starshine it sees and knows. The thoughts of the sailing clouds

descend upon its soul, and are sung in the murmur of its waters. For the river's song to me is the story of all that it has seen from the hills to the sea. If you could follow the river's course all along its length, you would see many beautiful things; but even then the river would have the better of you, for it could begin all over again in a moment; and the things it saw would not be the same.

What a world of memories the river has to tell the sea at the bar, where the fierce tides rush up to meet its fresh waters! Listen, and you can hear the sound of many things. Even the ripple of the water in the well high up upon the distant moorland is there amid the roar of mighty waters. Maybe some of the veriest silvery drops that you held in the hollow of your hand when you stooped over the mountain spring are there in the estuary's rolling flood. The streamlet kissed your lips with its cool ripple as you drank at the well through which it flowed.

And your kiss is still upon the lips of the river as it mingles with the mighty waters of the ocean. Memories of the long green grasses that bent over its youthful banks; of the

purple heathy moor where the birds flew upon strong wings over its early stream, calling wild and free to the sky ; of the old, old well where many a traveller stayed and was refreshed by the pure cold water ; of the deep ravine where the green ferns grew and the waters tumbled and foamed over black rocks ; of the still, dark wood where the shade of heavy leafy boughs hung over the river's laughing face, and the flowers hurried down to the edge of the water that their roots might drink of its freshness and they should hear the murmur of its song ; of the broad green meadows where the children played and sang among the long grass ; of the bridges that carried the white roads over the waters, and the people who came to listen at eventide to its story ; of the birds that sang it on its way their happy songs ; of the sunlight that sparkled and danced upon its waters all the long summer days ; of the glorious sky that mingled its blue with the flowing stream ; of the glimmer of stars upon a still night, and the " unseen feet " of the moonlight walking upon the murmurous ripples ; of the eternal hills, whose summits night and day were mirrored in its depths—all these does

the river tell to the sea, and the sea rushes up from the far horizon and hears them with a fierce joy, for now they belong also to the sea.

And so the river and the sea mingle their waters and their memories with the beating of the waves, and the river looks back for the last time upon the hills, and forward for the first time to the horizon's rim. But the last time is never the last to the river, nor the first the first. For the hills and the horizon are the same to it, and even while the ocean waves are embracing it, still it is beginning its long journey far away among the green rushes that grow by the mountain spring.

And so we are on the long seashore, where the rolling breakers beat eternally. And of all water the sea is the most mysterious. The tragedy of Nature is in the sea. You can hear it in the booming of the waves. Even where the sun shines and the sea smiles, it is but through its tears, for there is always that deep sadness and moaning in the sound of its waters.

The sea moans for the memories that lie beneath the waves—all the memories that the

river has brought, all the memories of the men who have journeyed over its pathless wilderness, all the memories of its own long-tossed waters. Long have the evenings crimsoned its restless surface, and left a path of golden light, like that through which the gentle Hiawatha sailed into the sunset, from the yellow sands to the burning horizon, and yet of all those bygone glories only the memory is left.

No spring comes on the waves to renew their youth, as it does on the green earth ; the years go by the same, unmarked, and all that is left in the end is the wild waste of tossing waters. The sunny days come and go, as the white-crested waves lap their feathery foam upon the beach ; and the stormy nights come and go also when the waters cry aloud in a great agony, and the wind shrieks above the whirling spray ; but never the sight of the earth's youth comes to the age-worn waters, save only afar off upon the line of green hills that fringe the shore.

So the sea is old and grey and worn ; it is the only thing in the world that bears the impress of the ages. The delight of peaceful summer days never falls lastingly upon its

waters ; for though the sea-winds are calmed and the rippling waves hurry in under the sunlight and try to make believe they are glad, you need only stay and listen for a moment, and you will hear that moaning undertone that comes from the sadness of the sea's heart.

And the mystery of the sea is as unfathomable as its own weird depths, as wide as its own wandering waves. But if it only knew, the sea might be glad also. For the winds blowing over its waters gather to themselves secretly and silently their freshness and life. They wrap it deep in the folds of the clouds, and whirl it landwards where the silent winter fields are waiting. Down from the clouds, over mountain and valley, the hidden sweetness pours, and wakes the rivers from their frost-bound sleep, and bids them flow anew through the world. In the fields, beneath the cold earth, the flowers feel the re-awakening life, and rise to scatter their scent and colour through all the land. And seeing the budding flowers and the bursting leaves, and feeling the fragrance of the winds from Southern seas, the birds grow glad, and sing the whole earth to

life again, and all things rejoice in the glad days of spring. Yet all the while the old, old sea moans and moans, whether the days be sunny or grey.

Thoughts by a Wall

XIII

I WALKED up from the old house till I came to a wall which divided the fields, and there stayed awhile and let my thoughts wander where they would, away with the wind which blew gently down from the hills among the trees of the wooded glen which ran down the side of the meadow; or dart swiftly on the swallows' lightsome wings to and fro over the waving grass. The meadow through which I had come had been mown a week or two before, but already the luxuriant grass was springing as freshly as ever, and the breeze advanced over its myriad blades with swift, undulating sweeps like the rolling billows of the ocean.

On the other side of the wall the hay was not yet gathered, but lay strewn upon the earth awaiting the coming of the reapers, no longer to move gently at the bidding of the wind and cover the earth with far-spreading greenness, but dead and drying under the

sun ; though even dead, still to give of the fulness of its beauty and strength, stored up, as it were, through the long, cold winter, until the dawning of a new spring should animate again the sleeping roots and arouse the whole world into a new life.

The trees in the glen swayed whisperingly against the golden sky of the west, and out of the thickets there came, with swift, wheeling flight, the swallows ; while hidden away in the mazes of the leaves, where the sound of the brook, flowing, as I knew, under great clumps of cool green fern and tangled grasses, issued in a low murmurous melody, were many thrushes, whose liquid songs floated out sweetly upon the clear air. The land hereabouts falls gently towards the river which is seen below, a silvery stream, first coming from under dark, still woods, and flowing on between the meadows, some of them glowing with the clearest emerald where the long grass has been shorn and taken away to the quiet barns, others busy with the figures of harvesters, and still others yet in all the glory of their swaying, summery, wind-blown beauty.

Just below, from my outlook, I saw the

village, lying sheltered from the strong west winds beneath protecting trees, the grey roofs, with that air of quiet and peacefulness which seems to hover about all country dwelling-places, and the chimneys, with fantastic smoke-wreaths curling upwards until lost in the blue haze of the brooding sky.

Beyond the river the land rises again, and the road goes steeply up from the valley, to be lost among the woodlands in the middle distance, and to appear again, a white thread winding round the shoulder of one of the farmost hills, which seem to watch so calmly and thoughtfully upon the country beneath, anon a shadow reposing upon their brow, and then lightening again into the bright green of the fresh bracken and the brown patches, where in August the heather will bloom in soft and liquid purple.

While I am there standing by the wall at the head of the meadow, my eyes wander dreamily over the landscape, and my thoughts, too, go drifting away out upon the vision of the mind—away, far away until they are lost in the mysterious haze which lies upon the horizon of understanding. For there is some-

thing more than the mere concrete sights and sounds of the open air; something more than the bird-songs, the breath of the wind, the play of light and colour upon the hills, the sound of the brook, the flowing of the river, the waving of the long grass, and the rocking of the trees. All these things I can grasp, and in some measure understand.

The sunlight, the white and blue of the clouds and sky, the green and gold of the meadows, the uncountable hues of the flowers in the hedgerows, the springing grass at my feet, the rush of the wind from the far hills, the hum of the bees working amongst a thousand flowers —all these the eye can see, the ear hear, the lulled senses delight in rapturously yet languorously. But there is something more than all these; something not a sound, nor a visible thing, scarcely even a thought, hazy, indefinite yet plain to feel; something beyond all tangible, physical things and the human power of expression, yet a quivering life.

It is as if I could see the very grass growing and feel the expanding of the great trees —indeed, as if I could see and feel the whole silent progress of the world's growth.

Thoughts—and yet they are hardly so formed as thoughts—come down from the great sky, rush in on the breath of the wind, flow out of the growing things, speak in the voices of the birds, sound in the droning of the bees—what of these? Who can grasp them? Who understand? Yonder amongst the grass is one of Nature's diamonds—a drop of crystal water left by the shower of an hour ago. It lies in the heart of a leaf of ladies' mantle, which grows plentifully here in the meadow. There are hundreds and hundreds of them down near the roots of the grass, but here I can see only this one, catching the clear sunlight and reflecting it back in a silvery sparkle glittering in a bosom of green.

I turn away to look out over the fields, and when I again look back towards the place where it rested it is gone. Whither? The sun's rays have melted it away, or the passing wind has shaken the leaf which held it, and the glistening water-drop has trickled down to the warm earth and is lost among the tangled roots—I know not which. The thought goes on travelling in swift flight. A single, simple water-drop in a little leaf, and what beyond?

One leaf amongst millions upon millions of them, one tiny globule of water out of an uncountable, unthinkable, infinite number; one blade of grass out of all the fair green meadows which lie between me and the hills yonder; the life that lives underneath the earth, warm and undying through the seasons and the years, and sets the grass growing again, and makes the trees ever put forth fresh leaves, myriads upon myriads of them, and keeps the river always flowing through the valley; a little secluded valley in all this England; a little country bound about by mighty oceans and the lands and seas beyond; a world floating in infinite space and all the planets that circle round the sun; the great mysterious processes by which those worlds first were formed and made to travel their appointed paths—and then, maybe, I am only at the beginning. How much further, I wonder? Who can tell? Who can faintly imagine?

Strange it is to ponder upon these thoughts that the free air of Nature brings—so strange that it makes the mind to feel hardly within human bounds, not of this life, but absorbed partially, as it were, into the elements around.

I wonder what it would be, for instance, were one to become part of the winds of the heavens. A greater traveller, I think, than ever mortal thought of in the most fanciful dreams, even in these days of swift and world-wide excursion.

Think of it—to fly for ever through the ethereal atmosphere, now floating gently as the flowing of a placid river, over flowery meads, golden in the sunlight, and now rushing wildly over bleak and barren mountain sides upon the wings of the fiercest storm that ever beat upon the face of the world ; soaring over unbridged, unfurrowed oceans, penetrating to the wild places of the earth where never the face of man was seen, maybe casting off the shackles of terrestrial attraction altogether and passing away, away, out into the farthest realms of space, and winding through the mystic mazes between the stars of the night—ever moving, never staying either in the rosy dawning, or the noonday sunlight, or under the evening's golden skies, nor yet in the dim shadows of the night. What should I see ? What should I learn of the hidden things of the universe ?

Or again to imagine oneself a rock upon the

summit of some mighty mountain, bearing the passing of the centuries, immovable and unchanging as the hills are; to see the world from almost its very beginning; to see the country change beneath, the advance of a thousand years, and yet another thousand passing as a day; the building of the cities of the old and the new world and their decay; the coming of conquering empires to live a few short years and then to pass away for ever; the uprising of new peoples and the downfall of majestic nations; the mountains have seen all this, and yet they bear the weight of uncounted time with not so much as a shadow upon their heads, while we who live in the valleys are born and die between the rising and the setting of the sun.

And so these dream-thoughts go on and on, every little atom of a thing in all the wide field of Nature containing its own story and its own imaginings; only I cannot follow the simplest of them but for a tinily short distance, and then I am lost and adrift in the great sea of unthought-of things.

Every passing hour brings its changes, and while I stand here, looking out upon the valley,

the setting sun is foretelling the coming night with a new store of wonders and mysterious dreamings. It is not for me to read the meaning of them all, but I think sometimes I can feel the truth which lies beyond the haze of the distant horizon-thoughts. A broader outlook upon the world's happenings, a kindlier thought for those who cannot see, a deeper trustfulness of the great unknown—are not these the things that are out there, away in the promise of the coming years? The once golden sky is burning crimson now, the shadows of the great hills are creeping up the valley, the wind is falling like the day that is nearly ended, and in its breath is the chill of the coming night.

Under the spell of evening a wondrous calm comes over earth and sky. The light is slowly dying in the west, the sounds of the living things of the air and the fields take on a more hushed tone. Soon the stars will begin to throw their trembling beams from the unmeasured depths of the darkening heavens, soon the hills will be robed in shadowy mists, and the cry of the night birds will echo from the dark woods. There let me leave it all—

there in the shadow of the brooding night, while the earth sleeps and I, too, till the dawn shall come again with the magic of its warmth and light; but the Story—staying not for night or morning, dusk or dawn—sleepeth never.

A Memory of the Sea

XIV

AWAY upon the northern coast of Ireland is a line of steep, jagged, frowning cliffs, at whose base the ocean beats in an unending measure of mighty sound.

As far as the eye can see, the rockbound coast stretches away, here throwing out great rugged, towering projections, with cruel, black rocks, where they meet with the flowing tide, and there falling back into sheltered bays, where the waves break into soft fringes of white and feathery foam. Always where the land and the waters meet there is the sound of the world-old song of the sea. Sometimes the waters come in under the smile of soft summer skies, with abounding happiness upon the dancing wave-crests, and the thrill of gladness in the sounding mazes of their ocean music; and at other times with the long, heavy thundering of roaring waters, and the swirl of fierce wind-currents driving them onwards, conveying

the suggestion of an awful immensity of power that no man knows of, and with a great, deep sadness in their booming upon the shore.

How full of grace and beauty in form and colour is each wave on its inward course from the great outside waters ! From the shore it is difficult to tell where they first come into being out of the great bosom of the ocean, especially on a day of comparative calm ; forty or fifty yards from the land the waters are heaving and tossing in rhythmic undulations, but the restless surface bears not a sign of the white, broken crest of a wave. There are hollows and rounded, smooth ridges constantly changing and rechanging places, but it is all smoothness and sweeping curves ; there are no sharp, broken edges like those of the breakers.

But, as I look, the moving waters form themselves in places into a deeper hollow and a higher, long, unbroken line, which comes hurrying in to the land ; a concave curve comes into the nearer side of the long line, and then for an instant the flowing of the tide seems to cease, the wave (for it has become such now) poises momentarily above the level of the sea, and then falls over in a long white streak

of boiling, bubbling surf, and a sudden, dull, but resonant sound, like a single beat upon a muffled drum.

Sometimes the wave does not break simultaneously along its whole length, but the white line of foam runs from end to end, and from a distance it seems as if some invisible hand were drawing a piece of chalk swiftly across the water, and the sound comes with an impetuous, unstayable rushing.

How simple a thing it is, but yet how wonderfully interesting and how hard to describe, this breaking of the sea on the shore. It goes on all through the long day, and the night, too, not a thing of moments, or of hours, or of days, or even years, but for ever—this boom, boom, boom of the sea, until you wonder how the shore can bear the constant beating and yet remain, and even when you go back to the streets again and are away from the beach, you fancy you can hear it still.

For the voice of the sea is hard to leave, and harder to forget there is such a store of vast mystery in its tones. Think only of the last drops of water from the last wave (the last to you only, for it is only you that pass

away) as they flow backwards through the stones and sand upon the beach. They are met again by another wave, and another, and yet another, so continuous, and speaking so of the eternal that sometimes it makes me feel sad to think that I am not eternal, too, that I might hear the ocean everlastingly.

For to-day I come down to the seashore, and watch the waves in their endless procession and recession, and go away again, and return in a day, in a month, in a year, maybe, and still there is the same long rushing of the waters and the same deep booming upon the strand.

The people in the town wake and work and sleep, and wake again, and still there comes from the sea the same sound of many days. The years pass, and the centuries, but only the sea and the cliffs remain; the cities are silent and grass-grown ruins, like those of the old church yonder at the top of the cliff, whose bells once rang out across the waters, but whose peals are now for ever still; the people wake and work no more, but sleep their last long sleep, and yet the endless echoes of the sea are unsilenced, and the waves hurry in still from the far horizon line over the wide waters

to the foot of the headlands. To-day I am here; to-morrow, maybe, I shall lie with the dead years, and the song of the sea unheard for evermore. But at least while I am here, I have the thought that the sea I look out upon is of the past as well as of the future, and so its voice, echoing down all the long ages, may perhaps bring something of them all to me.

In the yard of the little church of which I spoke it is said there were laid to rest, many, many years ago now, the last earthly remains of some of the sailors of the Spanish Armada, whose ships, fleeing from the victorious fleet of England, were cast and lost upon the deadly rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

This may be but tradition, but still the memory is there, and I like to think of those sailors of the bygone years, lying here within the sound of the waters which were their life and death—here near the old church, whose humble fabric has outlived the might of the people who once were as near to being the rulers of the world as mortal men can be. Far from the borders of their own land they lie, forgotten long years ago by their people, yet remembered still by the eternal sea, which

sings to them night and day of the distant past.

I remember, too, not very far from the church there was an old castle now but a ruin, but with what a world of memories clinging to the ancient walls which looked so calmly out over the ocean! It stood at the very edge of the cliff, with the waters a hundred feet or more below, sending upward the eternal song-story, and with the impress of the long past years borne upon the crumbling towers. Now only the seabirds circle and wheel and cry where once from the battlements men of other days watched, and the courtyards below perhaps echoed with the tread of armed soldiers. The church and the castle and the memories of the men who had sailed across the water below from a far-off country—all telling of the silent past, of the things that are dead and gone for ever, things that are remembered only in the spirit of the dreams which linger by the everlasting waves.

How soon all things become only a memory; how swiftly does the unending advance of unstayable time steal away the moments and the days; what is the lesson that it teaches? Is it not that we should seize quickly upon

the joy of the present moment, hold and take it close into the heart lest it go by for ever into the void of the unremembered and unknown? Quickly let me take of it, before it slips away into the past, where the memories of those dead men linger, and the clash of arms in the old castle rings, and the tolling of the bells in the church tower floats out over the sea. Deeply let me drink of the beauty of the sky and the earth and the sea, lest the cup be drained by the lips of unquenchable time, and none of its nectar be left for me.

Long let me linger in the sunlight glorious and golden, tinging with living light the waving grass and the fluttering leaves on the tree, and sparkling with silver the myriad wave-crests upon the azure waters—as long as I can, at least, for the light will one day die and the grey shadows fall where to-day are the green and gold and white and blue in a great flood of glowing colour. Let me stay here upon the edge of the cliffs, even though it be but in memory, and dream over the thoughts that come to me out of the void, lest the time should soon come when the limbs will grow too weary to take me to it all again, and the eyes too dim to see. Now—

to-day—for in but a few moments to-day will be only yesterday, and yesterday will never return, but recede slowly down the dim aisles of remembrance until at last it shall reach the gates of forgetfulness and depart for ever from the sight and hearing.

It is only of a memory that I am writing, and yet how clear it all seems. That day we went down into one of the quiet coves, where the waves ran laughing in to meet us, a welcome in their rippling voices, and took a boat and put out upon the waters.

Rocked on its bosom as gently and as tenderly as the mother moves the cradle of her babe, by the sea which on other days had dashed the mightiest ships that ever sailed the waters to shattered destruction upon the teeth of the rocks, we passed under the mighty cliffs, looking up wonderingly at the fantastic shapes wrought upon the summit of the giant heights, around huge amphitheatres of rock rising sheer out of the waves, and into dark sea-caves wherein the blue waters turned to blackness under the gloom of the jagged roof, while outside was still the vision of the sunlit waters in a golden afternoon.

The sunlight, indeed, is above all things in the memory of that day by the sea. Transfiguring everything with the brilliancy of its beams, it shone through the cloudless sky, over the steep headlands, and across the wide-reaching waters—sunlight that flowed around one's being with such a radiance that the darkest things that ever were in the world seemed golden through it ; sunlight that sank into the very depths of the soul, and melted away all the lingering sorrows and wonderings.

Who can be sorrowful when the sun is shining ? Filling everything with the gladness of life, setting the whole world young again after the long, dark shadowful days that winter brings, driving the grim shape of despondency, which visits every one of us sometimes, out from the door of the heart and bringing the good fairy of hope in its place—that is what the sunlight does for every one alike. Even the sad old sea the sunlight kisses into smiles—as it did that day, and gave to the waters the clear blue of the sky above, deepening into a glowing violet near the horizon.

Up on the cliff-top, where I went when the

boat took us in to the land once more, there was the same hovering happiness in the very air. Looking back towards the land, there were glimpses of emerald meadows, with fields in between full of the blue of the flax-flower, as if patches of the sky had fallen to mingle with the green of the earth. The tangled grass grew thickly over the edge of the rocks, and through the space between the cliffs and the water the seabirds, whiter than the whitest wave, flew upon glad wings.

And so the day drew on towards the close —but the pity of it that such days should ever end! Now, as I write of it when the years have passed since last I looked out from the cliff over the ocean, the magical, enchanting beauty of it all comes back to me over the gulf of time with all its vivid freshness and all its heart-moving spirit. Not a detail is lost, not a tiny particle of colour has faded, not a single one of the moments of supreme happiness is left uncounted. Every ripple upon the water, every gradation in the depth of blueness upon the surface of the sea, every white-crested wave that came rolling in from the wide ocean, the fringes of lace-like foam that caressed the

edge of the rocks, the majesty of the towering headlands, the cool stillness of the dark sea-caves, and the vision of the laughing waters beyond and without the arching entrance, the silent watch kept by the ruined castle throughout the long years, the rich greenness of the grass-grown cliff-top and the meadows falling away behind—I see them all again as I write of them to-day as clearly and as brightly as when I was living in the fulness of the present joy of that day of a bygone summer.

Often when the skies that overhang the town are dark-lowering and weeping, and when I see nought from my window but the greyness of the streets, the vision of the sunlit, golden glories of that scene comes back to me—the ethereal azure upon the ocean, the soft, limpid, summer sky, the boldness of the frowning cliffs, and over all the air of crystalline purity bearing the touch of the breath of the sea and the sound of its endless murmured song-story.

Sometimes I think that all through that long summer day I lived only in the atmosphere of a dream. But though the day has gone the dream remains, unforgotten and unfading. Into my heart was absorbed something of the

wondrous beauty of those wide, sunlit waters, and that can never be cast out, for until the mirror of my memory is broken and laid aside for ever I shall see often reflected in its depths that dreamland vision of the waves of the ocean as I first saw it on that day long ago.

Moorland Musings

XV

THERE is a moorland road which winds among the brown hillsides of a country where the breezy fell-land stretches for miles in rough, heather-covered undulations. On the hills the sheep feed placidly under summer skies in mild contentment, and face, with calm, uncomplaining eyes, the fierce rains which sometimes drive up the valley from the distant sea-coast on stormy western winds, seeking shelter with slow, unhurried footsteps.

Over the rugged moorland, in the glamour of hazy distance, rise the faint blue summits of distant mountains, dreaming under the peaceful sky, and here and there the hills dip gently down into a pleasant valley, the rough brown grass of the mountain-side brightening into the brilliant dew-washed meadows, where the shadows of the trees stretch lazily across the grass and below croons the gently-flowing river.

Near to the stony road of the moorland a

little stream trickles noisily down a steep ravine, and sometimes I have left the roadway to trace its course up the hillside, twining through the knotted heather roots and the tangled grasses of the moor, until the tinkling music of the spring where the streamlet is born breaks in silvery tones upon the clear fresh air. There, hidden away in the breast of the everlasting hills, I have looked, entranced and dreaming, into cloudless, limpid sky, followed with delighted eyes the great arching curve from the zenith to the horizon, and looked over the rolling, rugged wilderness of the moorland bathed with the golden gleaming of the sunlight of a summer afternoon.

Who would exchange this heaven-sent breeze, the peace that lingers over the far-spreading fells, the fairy music of the new-born stream, my couch among the purple heather, with face upturned to the deep, thoughtful sky, for aught else that the world contains?

It is so beautiful here in the fleeting glory of the summer, so far away from the grey monotony, the sordid cares, the vain strivings, the disappointed hopes that one sees on every side in the clamouring, unlovely, loveless streets,

that it needs an effort that is scarcely worth the making even to remember or to think of those things.

For there is nothing of the meanness or the care or the sorrow of life in Nature ; however much the world has changed in respect to man's life, the life of the world itself, the world of Nature, is the same as ever it was when existence first began, and out in the hidden haunts of the hills, under the open sky, it is as if one were hearing again the primal voices of the world's great being, living in the thoughts that lingered on the threshold of creation, taken back again to the beginning of all joy and hope and beauty. And yet there are so few of us who realise it, or even know of it.

Here on the moorland, amid all this abounding loveliness and the sweet influence of Nature's own sweet, kindly spirit, it seems terrible to think of the darkness and the sadness that lie away behind the walls of those dreary towns. Why, I wonder, should it be that so many of the people seem to be compelled never to see or hear or know of the peaceful calmness and solitude of the resting-places of Nature, where lie all the beautiful thoughts, all the

golden visions, that bring light into dull lives, all the dreams and glimpses of the ideal and the true that ever were in the world, and stay always amid the grey outlook, the cramped vision where there is never a ray of joy and beauty shining. Never a sight of the dawning loveliness of the sunrise, nor the solemn beauty of the crimson west at evening, never the sound of the running streams, never the freedom of the wind-swept moorland—only a dull, monotonous dragging out of existence.

Why do they not sweep it all away for ever, consigning all its misery to the dim chambers of the past? For this life of the towns to-day, when considered here amidst all the peaceful, beautiful circumstances and surroundings of Nature, seems to be so utterly wrong and mistaken that it is hard to imagine that any one would choose it of his own free will.

Yet even here, under the open sky, I am reminded of its fettered wretchedness, for as I lie in my moorland retreat, with the shining of the golden sun above and around, the calm solitude of the thoughtful hills giving such a wondrous peace to the soul, and the gentle voice of the new-born stream—the stream at its

very beginning, with all the miles of sinuous loveliness before it in the valley that lies below —singing in my ears, there comes another sound, that of the footsteps of some solitary passer-by upon the road just below, the only one within an hour upon this lonely pathway of the hills of mine, and it brings me back again into the present world.

"I must go now, or I shall be late," I say, thinking of the end of the journey that I have interrupted to stay awhile here in this fastness of the hills. Saying it, I pause and think how sadly that thought runs through the existence of so many. Go, when all I want just now is to stay here and dream, for ever maybe, the dreams of the great world! I remember seeing on my walks sometimes a ruined, roofless cottage around whose walls has grown the rank grass, wild and beautiful; or the ancient remains of a Roman roadway, whose silent stones, worn and aged, are lying in a meadow clothed with the beautiful grass of spring.

Would it not be glorious to be as the lifeless stones are, lying there through the long, long ages, under the glowing summer skies, feeling the youth of the spring awakening

throughout the silent earth year after year, and then the cold, dead leaves of autumn falling sadly down and burying me in their own strange thoughts as the sky grew cold and grey —always at peace, feeling no change of human circumstances, unfettered by human thoughts and cares, and yet seeing and knowing the meaning of all things ?

Is not the existence of to-day an ill-planned and wrongly-conceived thing ? We have never time enough to do the things we most want to do, never time enough to take the joy and the happiness and the fulness of youth when it is with us, but must wait until the useless task has been accomplished, and then it is so often too late for any joy and any life. It is a sad commentary upon man's management of life's affairs, but it is so in every portion of the existence of the town to-day. As if life is not short enough without making it shorter by wasting the golden hours in the performance of dull and useless drudgery ! Too soon the sun will set on the brightest day—so soon that the beauty of the passing hours can never sink deeply into the soul in reality, but is left only as a dim remembrance

Yet we do not even seize the joy that may be ours, in spite of all this. Nature is at our doors, full of her beautiful thoughts and her glowing ideals, and yet deliberately and purposely, it seems, we are turning away from the joy that her life would impart, and even try to destroy her spirit itself.

We shut ourselves away in the appalling ugliness of the towns, trample underfoot the soft green earth with our hot, hard pavements, ruthlessly cut down the forests and the flowers, strive even to hide the sunlight with the high walls of our noisy factories and the dreary streets, without ever thinking that beyond there is the real life, which is life because it is large and wide and free and joyful and full of all the happiness that the world can hold—a life that is far, far greater than all these little artificial contrivances of ours to exist—the life of the fields and the hills, and the streams and the sunlight.

Ah! there is so much joy and happiness in the world, so many beautiful things to see and hear and know of, and yet every day of our lives we work and work at the dreary round of useless toil. Useless, I say? Not perhaps

useless in itself, but useless if it means the exclusion of all joy and hope and happiness; and that is what it does mean to so many of us—an endless plodding at the mundane, the mean, the sordid, eyes bent down upon the common earth and never raised to the appeal of sentiment, of spirituality, of the ideal. Upon it all our thoughts are bent most earnestly, all our faculties of intellect and of character are applied most intently, and all the time everything that speaks of hope and aspiration and affection and love is being strangled—killed for very want of a ray of the light of joy and happiness and life—and all for what? For a respectable balance at the bank, for the desire to flaunt position, for the envy of power, for the applause and approval of the groundling populace? These things are so great and important to some of us—but what are they if we are missing all the joy of life, letting it slip by us into the unrecallable past?

Sometimes, when the sunlight is throwing its golden beams upon your towns, penetrating even through the dark smoke from your rumbling factories, lighting up the greyness of the

interminable streets, casting a tiny ray of beauty even into the depths of your terrible slums, do you ever think of the happy peaceful country, the fair meadows smiling under the sunny summer sky, the rippling of the placid river, and its murmured story of the ages, the mountains watching calmly and thoughtfully over the pleasant valleys with their grey, nestling villages and farmsteads, and say, " I would go, but I cannot " ?

Why ? There is the weary work to be done, and you must do that, even though the happy hours of the sunlit day are swiftly passing, never to return again. You have not enough time. No ! That is always the cry—the cry that echoes up from the hearts of a weary people, inarticulate maybe, scarcely knowing what they ask, but with a longing for a larger life that is a greater longing than all the others in the world.

For so many there is never time enough to leave the jading turmoil of the town for awhile, and go to the peaceful country ; never even enough time, if you do go, to stay upon the mountain side, with the free air and the majestic sky around and above you and the sweet

voices of Nature whisperingly telling the way to the golden future. There is never time enough for you to read the most beautiful books, never the opportunity to see the greatest examples of the magic of the painter's idealising art, or to hear the enchanting strains of inspired music. These are ideals, spirit-like, beautiful things, and there is no time for them to-day. There is always something to be done first, something that is only mean and ugly and useless enough to you, and uninspiring, and so often that dreary task is never accomplished until at last the hands fall helpless and the eyes close for ever.

They would not come, these people, even if they were offered the opportunity, you say? They would not read the books if you placed them in their hands, and if they read they would not understand; they would not go to see the pictures, even if they were at their very door; they would not go into the country and strive to grasp the thoughts and ideals of Nature, even if they had the chance.

Well, whose fault is that? Not theirs surely. For to-day you never offer them the opportunity for these things of the ideal.

Sometimes you take a few of your thousands of poor children to the country for a day—a single short day out of a long year, plume yourself on your kind-heartedness and your charity. Have you ever been on one of those pitiful excursions? It might be taken for granted that universal happiness is the keynote of such a day as this. With the children, of course, that is always the case, for no thought of the morrow can enter the child-life on such an occasion. It is enough for him to feel the spring of the turf beneath his feet, to see the vast blue sky overhead, to hear the whispering of the trees and the murmur of the stream.

These are sights and sounds new to your child from the slums, and no shadow of the future flits over the sunlit landscape of the present. But to you there is to be seen the sadness underlying the evanescent happiness. The light laughter of the children, after all, lies very near to tears, and sometimes the tears are uppermost. To see these little slum-bred creatures come from their wretched homes, to watch them as the breezes of the countryside bring an unwonted sparkle into sad eyes, a new colour into pinched cheeks, and drive

away the premature look of care which lingers in so many of their faces, is happiness indeed. But then to think of the others who are left behind in the dark recesses of the town, to think that the pleasures of these little ones can only exist for a few brief hours at the most, to think that only one short happy day in a long weary year is all the chance that many of them have of spending among the green lanes and fields, it is then that you realise the sadness of it all.

This is all the glimpse you give them of the beautiful and the ideal—the children whose life ought to be one that is all happiness and joyful and ideal, for the sadness and the sorrow come soon enough—the children whom at least you cannot blame for anything that ought not to be. How then can you say that the people would not take these things if they were given, when you have never even given them the opportunity of knowing and understanding what they mean ?

And the worst of it all is, that when you tell these things to so many men, they answer that you are talking merely of dreams. " We must deal with realities at the present day, and

not with thoughts of a golden future, however beautiful or desirable they may be," they say in effect. I wish so much that I could take these men with me sometimes to my country haunts, where no blindness or obscuring platitudes exist, but where all is free and open as the air of heaven.

For I think sometimes they are like one who might have been cooped up all his days within the confined limits of a narrow cell, noisome and lightless, and when some one comes in and tells him of the glory of the sunlight, the majesty of the mountains, the sweetness of the green pastures and the murmuring woodlands, the joyous songs of the birds, the happy ripple of the river, the thunderous melody of the mighty ocean, he would say, " I have never seen it, therefore it does not exist," or " I cannot imagine it, therefore it is impossible." The " realities " and " hard facts " of life, as you call them ! What are they in the mighty mystery of the life of the world ?

I remember again the moorland road as I walked upon it in the shadowy calm of a starry night. Far above the night solitude of the lonely road, in the depths of the great sky-

dome, gleamed the thousand lights of the shimmering stars—and how many miles of mystery between and beyond? There was something there that is not in the clamour of the market-place, nor yet in the roaring of the busy factories, nor in the noise of the thronging streets—something that is not even in the books where the dreamers enclose their golden thoughts.

How petty seem the chatterings of human tongues here, how vain the platitudes they utter, how empty their boastings of success, how worthless the applause or condemnation of the people, how foolish the bravely-spoken "I think this" or "I know that." For here it is plain that the man who knows most knows only as much as he who knows nothing. The facts and the realities—ah, where are they now? Out in the darkness of the night, under the cold, wind-blown stars, in the solitude of the brooding hills, or back there in the dreary town, where arises the voice of a tired people, drudging amongst their dull, grey streets, dying in the terrible slums, existing among all the common things of life?

Will you never leave this heart-breaking,

dreary existence, you who labour in the seething towns, leave the darkness of your gloomy streets, leave the feverish excitement and the glaring lights of your pleasure houses, and come out here to the lonely road of the moorland, climb the hills till the shadows fall far behind, and you see in the distant prospect the sunlight gleaming upon the glistening fields of the future?

Do you remember the old couplet—

Backward, turn backward, O Time, in thy flight,
Make me a child again, just for to-night.

Not Time, but just thinking about these things—does it not make us ever children? Indeed, are we not ever children, even the oldest and the wisest of us? For ever children, then—as children whose path seems always to be through the light and the joy, as children in hope and happiness, as children in trustfulness and believing in the future. Let us never think that darkness is always to be our lot—that because so many things are bad and wrong now, Fate has determined that it shall ever be so. Let us turn from the darkness of the mean and sordid to the glowing ideal of Nature's own true life, with faces towards the

light, expectant and hopeful, till at last the day shall dawn when our steps upon the path are no longer made tremblingly amid the shadows, but in the full glory of the sunlit meadows of the summer life.

An Incident of the Road

XVI

THE last wan, grey gleam of the twilight was fading over the western hills, and the loneliness of night was coming down upon the moorland roadway. It was that moment between the daylight and the dark when the wide spaces of the hills seemed full of the inexpressible solitude of Nature.

The autumn wind that moaned in the hollows of the rugged fells and blew with wild, weird sound through the emptiness of the moorlands, was bringing on its stormy breath the first drops of the fierce driving rain that was threatened by the wildly-hurrying sullen, ragged clouds that surged over the darkening sky. Soon the night would wrap the hills and the road between their windy spaces in the loneliness of its shadows; and the night boded to be one of autumnal rain and wind that in these moorland wilds often equals

the wildest of the winter gales in their tempestuous force.

My eight miles walk through the hills was threequarters accomplished. Climbing the moorland road from the valley behind, I had felt something of the day's-end tiredness in my limbs and a good deal of the loneliness of the hills in my heart. Nature was not in her most alluring mood this night; grand and heart-moving as ever were the wide rolling hills; but lonely, very lonely had been the road without the sound of a single footfall but my own upon the way.

But it was nearly over now, the tiredness and the solitude. The road dipped towards another valley, and far down in the shadows I had caught the glimpse of a light burning twinklingly through the darkness. In an hour, perhaps less, I should be at the journey's end. There would be a fire glowing merrily, and the warm, lighted room, and the welcome, and the happy sound of voices. And the tiredness seemed to go, and the loneliness of the hills to depart, as I thought of it. . . .

And then as the road passed over the edge of the moorland and turned away down towards

the woodlands of the valley, the spare, gaunt figure of another wanderer loomed up out of the wind and the shadows in front. He came towards me, and I saw that he was ill-clad and unkempt, and shivered in the chill, rainy wind. Even in the darkness I could see the paleness of his face and the haggard, soulless eyes. But he shuffled doggedly along the dim road, head down, as if the wind and the cold and the coming rain mattered nothing to him. Yet he must have been chilled to his very bones, for the wind was biting keenly even through the thick coat in which I was sheltered.

We stopped, spoke a few words, and then passed on, upon our divergent ways. Up the shadowy roadway, out into the wind and the lonely hills he went, a veritable figure of loneliness, outstanding even in the loneliness of the moorland. A little while before I had wanted human companionship. Now I would have given anything to have effaced the meeting from my brain. I had been lonely. What was the other wanderer on the road now? I had been tired. What of that other one who looked tired, too? I was nearly at the journey's ending. Where, I wonder, would his journey

end ? For me, soon, the fireside, the sound of happy voices, the sweet look in welcoming eyes. For him—what ?—I wonder.

Think of it—in free, happy, fair England—to-day !

I thought of him again an hour later in the warmth of the firelit room, amid the talk and the laughter. I thought of him, too, when I lay down at the resting-time and the wind moaned sadly at the window. The gaunt figure—the shivering frame—the weary voice—the wan face looking out of the shadows. And then his turning and walking away up the road—out into the hills—the night—and the cold, pitiless wind.

" He'd probably go and drink it," said the Superior Person to whom I told the story.

I don't much care if he did. The thing I care about is what brought him there.

JENNERS